

IMPURE AND WORLDLY GEOGRAPHY

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A Dissertation submitted for the degree of D.Phil., to the Faculty of
Anthropology and Geography, University of Oxford, Hilary Term 1996.



ABSTRACT

Impure and Worldly Geography

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D.Phil.

Hilary Term, 1996

This thesis provides a theoretical and historical examination of the production of contested colonial-geographical knowledge. Following a critical examination of recent 'contextual' histories of geography, it is proposed that treating geographical knowledge as colonial discourse is a more fruitful line of inquiry, and the emergence of post-colonial and colonial discourse theory is discussed. This leads on to a consideration of post-structuralist theories of textuality, discourse, and reading, as the preliminary to an analysis of the archive of the regular published knowledge of the Royal Geographical Society from 1831 to 1873. The racialised representation of non-European societies and subjects denies to them any status as active subjects of knowledge or history. It is found that the sanctioned geographical knowledge produced by the R.G.S. in the mid-nineteenth century depends for its identity on the construction of certain geographical knowledges, meanings, and practices as improper and inadequate. It is argued that the writing of geographical discovery thus involved the discursive dispossession of non-European societies of authority over geographical knowledge and territory.

PREFACE

The E.S.R.C. originally gave me a post-graduate award to do research on conservation of the urban built environment. Oh well. The path from there to here has moved from Cambridge to Oxford, on to Manchester, and now to Reading, all the while circulating around East Grinstead, of course. Various people in these various places have helped me on my way. David Stoddart showed that geography was more fun than economics, Paddi Salters shared in the peculiar distinction of being a Churchill geographer. I was blessed with a tolerant and supportive supervisor, David Harvey, and by the presence in (or around) the School of Geography at Oxford while I was there of Andrew Merrifield and Erik Swyngedouw, Adrian Passmore and Mike Samers, Stephan de Coorte, Avril Mander, Elsbeth Robson, Dave Matless, Dmitry Sidorov, Jack Langton, and Gargi Bhattacharyya and Jonathan Lenihan. St. John's College subsidised my book-buying, and let me live in Plantation Road for a while, which was lovely. The rough cut of this dissertation was completed while at the Department of Geography at Salford, where they didn't see much of me. I certainly learnt more while there than any of the unfortunates who experienced my first efforts at being a grown-up academic. My colleagues in the Department of Geography at Reading, and Murray Low in particular, supported me through my little hiccup, and have since gently cajoled me to finally finish the thing. And I should thank Robert Young and Felix Driver for calling my bluff first time round. The final product is much better for it.

Ross and Potter deserve a mention for providing a source of escape.

My family have sustained me in different ways, without ever quite getting what I was all about. This thesis probably doesn't help much in explaining, but here you are, have it anyway, in recognition and thanks.

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“Words - boy, they’re too much”

Lenny Bruce

INTRODUCTION

Confessions of a Sedentary Geographer

I have found myself out of place in language. The writing of this thesis has been driven by an amateur fascination with language nurtured while inhabiting a professional space in which anything but a passing attention to the stickiness of words is looked upon with grave suspicion. I am trying to unlearn the imperative to pass rapidly through language to some version of the 'real' which lies beyond, in the conviction that attending to language in the variety of its material forms is the means of attending to the very reality in which I am entwined. The only *geographical* issue which has ever exercised me is the strange problem of how it has come to pass that I know all sorts of things and have all sorts of opinions about places I have never actually visited and people I can't imagine ever actually meeting. The means by which the world comes to me - this is what concerns me most.

This thesis is part of this effort of understanding. I take colonialism and imperialism as my focus not, I should say, because I consider the particular episodes of geography's past which I deal with here as having a necessarily formative influence on contemporary practices. Taking colonialist geographical knowledge as my example serves as the convenient means by which to practice with some new and exciting difficult theory. The very availability for discussion in geography of the sorts of work I consider here, such as post-structuralism, deconstruction, and colonial discourse theory, is evidence that a break with past disciplinary practices has been instituted which

makes any ascription of continuity between nineteenth century and late-twentieth century geography open to doubt. It is only from this side of such a break that the sorts of reading that I present are made possible. The readings I present are aimed at exploring the suspicion that language is the place in which certain worldly exclusions and affiliations are registered. And if this reading is made possible by the untidy appropriation of theoretical ideas from other disciplines, I hope that it will inform my own attempts to question the relations of authority which shape contemporary practices of interdisciplinary exchange in the social sciences and humanities.

Impure and Worldly Geography

This thesis deals with the intimate historical relations between geographical knowledge and Western colonial and imperial power, and does so by focusing on the authority relations secreted at the level of the rhetoric of geographical writing. On the basis of my examination of the discourse in question, it is the connection between representations of racial and cultural difference on the one hand, and the ascription of differential legitimacy to forms of knowing and inhabiting geographical space on the other, which emerges as the axis around which the effects of social power internal to this example of geographical discourse revolve.

In order to establish the themes addressed in this work, I want to briefly consider a fragment from Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972), which lays bare the complicities between the highest and most treasured humanistic traditions of Western culture and the brutal and dehumanising

practices of colonialism. Césaire presents an analysis of the ‘objective work’ done by various cultural and scientific discourses - journalism, theology, academic specialisms, novels - in support of colonial domination. Behind the public avowals of good faith and humanitarian ideals, he finds modes of thinking that justify and encourage cultural, racial, and economic subordination. Amongst the examples he provides to illustrate this connection between humanistic ideals and colonial power is a brief examination of Pierre Gourou’s *Les Pays Tropicaux*, a multi-edition standard text on the economic and social prospects for development in tropical countries, first published in 1947. It is in Gourou’s understanding of the physical geography of the tropics that the colonial complicities of the text are located. The physical world in the tropics is presented as peculiarly sensitive to the effects of human transformation, characterised by unstable, finely balanced ecosystems. Gourou considers the consequences of colonialism for the tropics, and is critical of its ‘unintended’ negative impacts, but emphasises the centrality of science and technology to any future prospects for progress in tropical Africa, Asia, or South America. His treatment of the human and physical geography of different regions is a definitively humanist one. For him, geography as a discipline derives its force from its ability to delimit and confirm the rightful powers of ‘man’:

“Geography is not an abstract study. If its first task is scientific (i.e. to understand the face of the Earth, man’s work in changing that face, and the influence of the physical environment on man), it has nevertheless an ideal also. This ideal is to show that, if the influence of the physical

environment should never be lost sight of, the part played by civilisation is essential and predominant. Geography suggests that there is nothing fixed and rigid in that relation and that it can be modified in a way that is favourable to man. The physical world does not exert a determinist influence on man, who is master of his destiny if he is conscious of this mastery.” (Gourou, 1958:153).

If ‘man’ is here defined as the being which is consciously able to control nature and respect its vetoes, then this is a conception that is defined against a situation of passive obedience to Nature’s direction - the condition ascribed by Gourou to tropical societies, and the reason for their failure to develop and sustain any great civilisations.

This humanist vision closes a text which, in the very form of its analysis, identifies ‘man’ as a being who emerges only in the West. In Gourou’s construction of the relations between human and natural worlds in different regions, we see that apparently universal humanist principles rest upon the drawing up of divisions between societies which are fully human, and those to whom civilisation must be bought from the outside. He asserts that tropical societies are historically backward, and that they have made only small contributions to the ‘fund of human civilisation’, either in material, intellectual, or moral terms, a condition which is ascribed to the peculiarities of the physical environment and the lack of contact with temperate civilisations. Gourou’s judgement that no great civilisations have emerged in tropical lands is tied to the assumed failure to develop the proper means of asserting human mastery over the physical environment. But now, the

condition for such progress is at hand - in the shape of Western science and technology, which provides the key to understanding the limits of natural environments, and to the harnessing of nature to human progress. Here, then, we find a reiteration of the well-worn theme that progress and civilisation is bought to non-Western societies from the outside, through Western intervention and particularly through the gift of knowledge.

Césaire is scornful of such 'objective' analysis, which justifies continued Western dominance in an emerging post-colonial situation by asserting that civilisation only emerges in temperate zones, and that therefore the tropics suffer from "an effective geographical curse" (1972:34). It is such an understanding that structures Gourou's presentation of the essential paradox determining the future of tropical lands - they are faced with either economic stagnation, if the environment and native populations are to be protected; or the regression of both the environment and populations as the inevitable cost of economic development. Escape from the dilemma, which for Gourou is rooted in the physical geography of such regions, lies in the power of Western science and technology to control the natural environment, respecting nature's limits while simply not *obeying* its direction. For Césaire, Gourou's account represents the ideological transformation of a real social contradiction, one rooted in the social relations of colonial capitalism, into an essentially natural dilemma.

Césaire closes his discussion of Gourou's text with a simple remark, articulated with all the force of a denunciation: "What impure and worldly geography!" (1972:37). The critical force of this remark does not come from

claiming to protect the rightful standards of objectivity and impartiality, but from standing squarely within the world, where loud claims to objectivity, universality, and disinterestedness appear as hollow pronouncements justifying inequality and injustice. Césaire registers not the shock that geographical science should be this 'impure' and 'worldly' in its justification of domination. Rather, he mocks the pretence that knowledge is ever without worldly interests and responsibilities. All knowledge is 'impure and worldly' - this is the affirmation of Césaire's critique of Western humanist discourse. What matters is which interests are served and what responsibilities are accepted by engaging in its production.

Synopsis

In Chapter One, the recent revival of interest in the history of geography is critically examined. The focus upon 'context' characteristic of this revival is found to be limited in its ability to deal adequately with geography's historical role in the reproduction of relations of domination and exploitation.

In Chapter Two, theories of colonial discourse are critically elaborated in order to present a critical approach to the production of geographical knowledge which escapes from the limits imposed by the problematic of disciplinary historiography. Conceptions of colonial discourse which rely on models of projection are found to be inadequate as a means of establishing the imbrication of different societies and cultures. Theories of subaltern agency

are discussed, and it is argued that the recovery of shared histories from the imperial archive requires a particular conception of the work of reading.

In Chapter Three, the conceptual relations between texts and contexts are discussed. Deconstruction is shown to present a new sense of textuality which challenges forms of contextualisation which underpin historical interpretation. In consequence, deconstruction informs a specific understanding of the labour of reading in which the humanist subject is displaced from its role as centre and guarantor of interpretation.

Chapter Four considers the genealogy of the notion of discourse, a concept developed in order to understand language as a fully social activity. It is shown that the initial elaboration of the relation between discourse and the question of the subject remained tied to idealist frameworks, and the transformation of the concept of discourse is seen to hinge upon understanding it as social practice in which subjects are positioned in specific ways in relation to a field of objects. This returns the discussion to the question of reading, and a conception is proposed where reading is considered as the means of submitting to and making visible the effects of positioning instantiated by textualised discourses as their conditions of intelligibility.

These theoretical discussions are followed by a consideration of one specific institutionalised discourse, in the form of an examination of the regular published knowledge of the Royal Geographical Society from 1831 to 1873 with respect to the production of information about non-European societies and territories, and in particular about Africa.

In Chapter Five, the representation of non-European societies is found to take the form of a discourse of racialisation, which works according to a visual economy of constituting difference by reference to hierarchical and normative standards of physical appearance and bodily evolution. Non-European populations are represented as objects of cognition for an omnipotent scientific enterprise. This form of representation denies to those populations any active role as subjects of knowledge, and this is found to structure the representation of geographical facts in the discourse of the R.G.S.

In Chapter Six, examinations of the dominant forms of representing non-European landscapes, of describing indigenous modes of inhabiting territory, and representing the actual activity of scientific exploration, reveal that the effect of the production of this form of geographical knowledge is to deny legitimacy to ways of knowing and ways of inhabiting space which are incompatible with those interests determining capitalist economic and cultural expansion. The sanctioned geographical knowledge produced by the R.G.S. in the mid-nineteenth century, assigned the task of establishing the basic facts of the world's geography, depends for its identity on the construction of certain knowledges, meanings, and practices as essentially improper and inadequate. This knowledge is therefore actively implicated in the production of specific real spaces, and this is marked in the texture of the written discourse in the ways in which particular forms of knowing and particular objects to be known are presented as the only real and legitimate modes available.

1

UNDOING GEOGRAPHY

Disciplines and Histories

What is Geography? The study of the history of modern geographical knowledge has been overwhelmingly focused on providing a satisfactory answer to this narrowly disciplinary question, to such an extent that many of the histories written represent little more than what Smith (1991:160) characterises as a “looking glass search for identity”. Livingstone (1991a) suggests that a review of the history of geography shows that any quest for a single, all-encompassing definition is doomed to failure. There has recently been a significant revival of interest in the history of geography as a discipline, and geographical knowledge more broadly, and much of this attention has focused upon the relations between geography and empire (e.g. Godlewska and Smith, 1995; Bell, Butlin, and Heffernan, 1995). According to one commentary there is a move to break with existing approaches and disavow “both inward-looking disciplinary chronicles and broad-brush functionalist accounts of geography’s past.” (Driver and Rose, 1992:1). However, while the incontestable weaknesses of so-called ‘Whiggish’ accounts of geography continue to remain the main reference point against which alternatives are defined, there is a danger of foreclosing other directions that such alternatives could possibly take. This is most evident in the apparent consensus, which

defines the emerging new historiography of geography, that there is a need for a 'contextual' approach to the history of geographical knowledge.

The overt disavowal of 'presentist' perspectives may obscure unacknowledged agendas which remain rooted in specific contemporary problematics. There is a sustained absence of explicit theoretical comment on the connections between the study of past events and present concerns and perspectives. If the assertion of simple, linear continuities between past and present is not tenable (this being the major criticism of extant celebratory and legitimising histories of geography), then the turn to 'context' demands that some account be given of the relation between past and present that this approach posits. I would suggest that there is an identifiable continuity between the Whiggish histories of the past and the new historiography of geography. Although recent work focuses on often ignored episodes, and does not shy away from paying full attention to the more unsavoury associations of geographical knowledge in the past, the presentation of such histories as obviously of relevance today is more often rhetorically asserted than demonstrated. Ill-defined claims about the importance of studying geography's past in order to appreciate its current state act as a poor substitute for discussion of how historical study bears upon specific contemporary questions (cf. Barnett, 1995a).

The easy presumption of continuities between past and present which characterises 'contextual' histories of geography has the effect of reproducing the appearance of the stable identity of geography as a discipline across time, however much claims about the variety and plurality of 'traditions' within it

are asserted. The production of geographical knowledge as a process of 'disciplinisation' - the ways in which authoritative claims to know are founded upon the identification of certain groups as being unable to know - remains largely unexamined in the new interest shown in the history of geography.¹ It is not so much the content that provides the means of making meaningful connections between past and present, but the *form* of geographical knowledge - its form as *disciplined knowledge*. In making this assertion, I am suggesting that the historiography of geographical knowledge should refocus attention on the issues raised by the radical critiques in geography presented over the last three decades. From the radical critique of positivism through to the recent challenges of feminist geographers, the central issue has been the matter of what gets studied and by whom.

The politics of all disciplinisation of knowledge involves a "set of negations" by which certain possible themes, approaches and perspectives are marked out for repression by "those who wish to claim the authority of discipline itself for their learning." (White, 1987:62). In critically addressing this process of disciplinisation attention should be paid to what it is that is excluded and delegitimised by constructing objects of study in ways such that *not* to conceive of them that way would be a sign of a 'lack of discipline'. Disciplining knowledge involves the production of enabling divisions by which what can and cannot be known, and who can and cannot be agents of knowledge production, is established. This process involves expelling from the realm of the knowable particular objects of study, and reciprocally identifying

¹ The exception is work by feminist geographers. See Rose, 1995b.

certain subjects as irrational and unreasonable. The construction of such hierarchical oppositions is the condition for the progress of knowledge conceived as the projection of enlightened reason into realms as yet unknown.

The Contemporary Imperative

The contemporary rewriting of the history of geography is implicated in struggles over how to construct different, emancipatory forms of geographical knowledge. Smith (1990:555) insists accordingly that “[t]he history of geography is a serious project that goes far beyond arcane antiquarianism.” He argues forcefully for a renewed interest in the historical production of geography, insisting that any such focus must necessarily be founded in contemporary projects aimed at reconstituting intellectual practices in the future. The predominantly “descriptive, dull and defensive” (Smith 1991:160) accounts of geographical thought are ways of writing histories which erase the processes of production and conflict which shape the construction of any and all sanctioned, disciplined knowledge in modern social formations. Smith foregrounds active creation through struggle as the conceptual foundation for a renewed contextual and critical history of geography which addresses the most pressing contemporary concerns of radical geography:

“There is a struggle over which ideas best explain the past, a struggle over concepts appropriate for current research, and also, insofar as scientific research is obliged to have some redeeming social importance, a struggle over the way in which

the historical geographies of contemporary landscapes are to be fashioned. These struggles are as intermeshed as the history of today and the history of yesterday, the history of actions and the history of ideas. One of the most damaging aspects of plodding histories of geographical thought is the self-conscious reluctance to enter this fray, to test ideas, to engage in intellectual struggle beyond the narrow confines of the discipline - in short to expose any linen at all to the public gaze.” (160-1).

It is in the spirit of this challenge that I want to pursue the question of how to go about reconstructing geography’s past in a way that might illuminate issues of contemporary concern, and as Smith implies, the pursuit of this aim must necessarily involve going beyond the limited boundaries of academic geography. This transgression impinges not only on what can be legitimately studied as being ‘geographical’, but also necessitates a self-conscious commitment to the elaboration of new theoretical ideas.

What Lacapra calls a “rhetoric of contextualisation” (1983:14) is identifiable in much recent work on the history of geography. As he suggests (16), the claim to be returning texts to their contexts tends to occlude what is in fact a problem - the precise relation of texts to contexts - by presenting it as the solution to historical understanding. Questions of why a given context would be favoured over others, and of whether texts reflect, refract, or rework contexts, are obscured by the ritual incantation of ‘context’ as if appropriate contexts just present themselves naturally. Determining contexts for readings

always determines the forms of evaluation and judgement to which texts will be subjected. As Driver (1992:36) comments, it is this issue that continues to be evaded in the production of 'contextual' histories:

“Representing geography’s past is inevitably an act of the present, however much we attempt to commune with the past. Indeed, the idea of mapping the historical landscape depends on the construction of perspective, a view from the present, around which the panoramas of history are made to revolve. Yet ‘contextual’ history sometimes appears to deny this fact. Indeed, it might be argued that the ultimate fiction of ‘contextual’ history consists less in its separation of ‘texts’ and ‘contexts’, than in its continual silence on the mediating role of the historian.”

As we shall see, appeals to context derive from very specific contemporary positions, and the lack of explicit comment on this matter bestows upon such work all the rhetorical force which comes from the appearance of respectful adherence to the historical facts and/or a stoically disinterested neutrality. Following Smith (1991:162), I hold that historical study of geography’s pasts must indeed be contextual, but “must before all else be critical”. This injunction to be *critical* implies an explicit grounding in the contemporary scene. And with Benjamin (1968:253-64), we can affirm that to articulate the past historically does not involve recognising it ‘as it really was’. Rather, it demands a constructive effort to rest new significance from the past that is addressed to the ‘time of the now’.

The adoption of an overtly 'presentist' perspective cannot be dismissed as judging the past in terms of present standards, and nor does it involve positing a simple linear continuity between dubious practices in the past and the present. In this respect, Foucault's oft-cited interview 'Questions of Geography' (1980:63-77) is a pointer to the direction which a critical historical approach to geographical knowledge might take, and to the sort of relation that geographers should endeavour to cultivate with 'theory' developed in other realms. In this exchange, he lays down precisely what is at stake in his approach to the study of the past and does so in relation to the questions asked of him concerning geography's past. What is of interest is not how Foucault emerges as a postmodern geographer *avant la lettre*, but quite the reverse - how he explains why geography is of little relevance at all to him. Pressed on why his archaeologies ignored geographical discourses, he responds that he does not set out to work on a particular science "just because it's interesting or important or because its history might appear to have some exemplary value", a method which would lead only to a "correct, conceptually aseptic kind of history" (64). Rather his choice of what to study is guided by his own investment in particular conflicts and situations. His project was not to produce a general history or critique of all the human sciences or science in general, but to address those knowledges that impinged upon the conflicts in which his own practice and experience was situated. He addresses his interlocutors explicitly on the matter of the politics of historical study, and how his own work may be of some use to geographers:

“But if one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question.” (ibid.).

From this it follows that geographers should not look to figures such as Foucault to do the history of their discipline. These are not his concerns. He challenges his interrogators to appreciate the real implications of his work for them:

“It’s up to you, who are directly involved with what goes on in geography, faced with all the conflicts of power which traverse it, to confront them and construct the instruments which will enable you to fight on that terrain.” (65)

And he goes on to admit that he would be “delighted” if such a project found use for “one or two of these ‘gadgets’ of approach or method that I’ve tried to employ” (ibid.), always bearing in mind that they would need to be transformed and reformulated according to the specific problematic at hand. This invitation to actively appropriate and transform the theoretical resources developed by thinkers like Foucault is one I shall take up in due course. Here I want to underline how his approach grounds historical research in the present. Elsewhere he comments on the starting points of his ‘genealogical’ analyses:

“I set out from a problem expressed in the terms current today and I try to work out its genealogy. Genealogy means that I pose my analysis from a question posed in the present.” (Foucault, 1988:262).

Foucault's histories choose their materials strategically, analysing certain discourses in relation to certain problems he is concerned with.

Seemingly arcane questions of historiographical, theoretical, and philosophical method involve taking up specific positions *vis-à-vis* the contemporary political implications of knowledge production. The 'politics' of historical investigation therefore consists in how a particular set of techniques and standards of study, evidence, explanation, and understanding, reciprocally presupposes a 'philosophy of history' in such a way that specific visions of historical responsibility and possibility, particular inclusions and exclusions, and certain affirmations and denials are made in the course of historical reconstruction (cf. Cousins, 1987). Hirst (1985:51) argues that only a historical knowledge founded in present concerns can approach a standard of critique which avoids both relativism and rationalist detachment:

"All truth is available to us by the method of question and answer, problematising our question by the quality of the answers we receive. To recognise this historicity is not to historicise truth, to make knowledge no more than the expression of its own time. Knowledge develops by working over the past products of its activity, by asking new questions on the basis of criticism of old answers and marshalling new evidence relevant to those questions."

This understanding leads to a dialogical conception of historical understanding and research, understood as an exchange determined by contemporary

concerns, contrasting with the monologic, analytical posture of objective historiography.²

In the work of both David Stoddart and David Livingstone there is a rejection of previous modes of writing histories of geographical thought and institutions in favour of more contextual approaches. In both cases, the contemporary implications drawn by these authors from their historical analyses depend on certain unexamined and undeclared presuppositions. In the following two sections, I shall endeavour to reveal the political unconscious which structures what remains unexamined as much as what is made present in their respective projects. I shall endeavour to show that their accounts of geography's past remain valuable, in so far as the substance and detail of the episodes recalled by both authors can be read against the grain of the particular inflections that they give to them. It is possible to identify a disjunction between what is described and how these two authors choose to interpret it, to identify this as a sign of the foreclosure of potential critical analyses, and as the point from which alternative perspectives on the historical and contemporary significance of these events might proceed.

² See Billinge *et al* (1984) for a similar discussion in relation to reconstructing histories for geography.

Geography as a European Science

The work of David Stoddart on the history of specific geographical institutions and ideas is explicitly oriented towards establishing a vision of the future of geography as an academic discipline. Stoddart's provocative assault is on what he considers to be the sloth of contemporary geographers, especially upon those of the 'dry and bloodless' armchair variety. This work deserves attention not only because it addresses the period of European expansion and colonialism that is the focus of later chapters, but because it is animated by a powerful conviction that geographers should forge "a subject which provides a means of creating feelings worthy of humanity; it must fight against racialism, war, intolerance and oppression; it must dispense with the lies resulting from ignorance, presumption and egotism." (Stoddart, 1987:333).

Stoddart sets out to reconstruct geography's forgotten worldly roots, establishing a somewhat idiosyncratic counter-tradition in support of his vision of the discipline. Although his focus remains on the established lineage of academic geography, and geography remains for him a synthesising discipline, he insists that the real heart of geography necessarily breaks with the exceptionalist Kantian heritage by means of which geography has for so long "managed to isolate itself from virtually every major development in the field of scientific thought since 1859." (Stoddart, 1965:242). Geography must be reintegrated into the natural sciences, where it finds its proper place in a co-operative scientific enterprise. This conviction is reflected in the favoured names who, for Stoddart, epitomise this intellectual endeavour - men like Humboldt, Darwin, Cook, the Forsters, Reclus and Kropotkin, and Sauer.

Stoddart's is an openly revisionist account of a carefully selected tradition, one which starts from an awareness of the limitations of the way the history of geography has generally been written as a highly selective continuist tale with little contextual or explanatory power (Stoddart, 1981a). He seeks to both *explain* and *account* for the development of the academic discipline of geography, not just chart its emergence. Context and contingency are elevated as prime principles of his methodological approach. His aim is to recover the complexity of the history of geographical ideas and institutions by reconstructing the contexts in which *individuals* acted and produced the works and effects they did.

Stoddart focuses on the question of why and in what manner change occurs in intellectual history. In this respect, he concentrates on the adequacy of the Kuhnian model of paradigm shifts as an adequate approach to explaining change in geography, suggesting that it has been used simply to legitimise the partisan interests of different scholars (1986:9;17). He also doubts the usefulness of Kuhn's approach because of its explanation of change (1981b). Stoddart is dubious of Kuhn for two reasons, both of which illuminate his own vision of the status and dynamics of geography and geographers. Firstly, Kuhn identifies the changing attitudes and values of groups of scientists as the cause of paradigm change, and Stoddart objects to the implication that paradigms can be and are rejected independently of "any demonstration of error in scientific terms." (1986:13). It is Kuhn's conventionalism which is considered unacceptable, calling into question as it does a particular model of scientific objectivity, precisely that in which

Stoddart's story of geography invests so much faith. Secondly, Stoddart cannot accept Kuhn's approach because he considers it to actively distort the history of science "by reducing the participants to caricature figures" (ibid.). There is implied in this line of criticism a specific notion of what history is, one which continues to privilege the conscious intentions and actions of individuals in accounting for change, development, and innovation. In Stoddart's rejection of Kuhn we glimpse the outlines of his own conception of change in the realm of knowledge. Scientific objectivity and individuality are the privileged terms - geography is established by the persistent efforts of certain individuals to establish truth and objectivity in method and description as the central foundation of geographical science (Stoddart, 1982). Stoddart's story of institutional conflict and the individual perseverance of certain personalities remains uncritically committed to a quite conventional account of scientific progress.

Stoddart's genuine break with previous histories of geography lies in the degree to which he foregrounds *conflict and struggle* as the dynamics of change. He appeals (1986:8) to the Gramscian notion of hegemony as a concept with which to understand the emergence and institutionalisation in Britain by the end of the nineteenth century of a particular conception and practice of geography. Hegemony, drawing attention to the maintenance of dominance and supremacy through subordination, control, and deference, is used by Stoddart to frame his account of how the Royal Geographical Society (R.G.S.) was instrumental in establishing a model of geography in the British university and educational system. *On Geography* (1986) is a collection which

traces the different realms in which the conflicts which culminated in that institutionalisation took place. There is much of value here, yet Stoddart's appeal to Gramsci can be questioned. Hegemony is thoroughly shorn of any sense of structuration by social relations at all. The account of struggle and conflict is contained within the limited social arena in which the R.G.S. gained hegemony over other elite establishment institutions of science and learning in a context of aristocratic privilege and nascent bourgeois dominance. His is a story of how particular individuals furthered the interests of their chosen institutions through various means, and particularly by means of personal patronage. These actors are, as already suggested, granted privileged analytical status. The resultant account is limited, being severely uncritical at just those points when a critical stance is most called for. Stoddart's analysis "of the social and political relations *between individuals within institutions*" (1986:5 [emphasis added]) is constructed without any serious attention to the socio-economic and political context which framed both the processes of exploration and discovery abroad, and educational reform at home, despite these being for him the main contexts in which a proper appreciation of geography must be placed.³

Stoddart's understanding of conflict is not only too narrow, but curiously apolitical. This contemporary reconstruction is set up as a challenge to a perceived complacency, doubt, and decline in virility amongst geographers. Appeal is made not to an established lineage to affirm the saliency of contemporary practice, but rather to what he considers a lost or

³ Most recently, Stoddart (1992) has also attended to the military 'context' of the rise of the New Geography.

forgotten tradition with which to challenge disciplinary colleagues. The important point about all this, in so far as it impinges upon the lack of an adequate critical stance towards the particular past under consideration, is that Stoddart presents and revalorises the tradition of European geographical exploration and discovery as bearing the essence of the humanitarian geography he champions. He thus invests responsibility for his liberal humanist vision in an idealised version of practices which, in their very form and structure (which remain critically unexamined by him) contradict the very principles which he defends.

For Stoddart, the matter of how to go about doing historical research ultimately comes down to an issue of “what we understand knowledge to be.” (1986:5). He does not however pursue the full implications of this insight. Instead he proves himself unfailingly committed to precisely the conception of what constitutes geographical knowledge that was institutionalised by the end of the nineteenth century. While foregrounding conflict as the dynamic of change, his is nevertheless a story in which the winners are taken to have been the *rightful* winners. This is most evident in the essay ‘Geography, Exploration and Discovery’ (1986:142-57), which is pivotal to Stoddart’s vision of *real geography*. Here he recounts how the practices of fieldwork, exploration, and discovery were over time refined into suitably objective, rigorous practices of proper science. This involved the rejection of other practices. What is *described* here, for instance in the fate of the ‘fieldwork movement’ and the Le Play society in the early twentieth century, is the way in which a particular mode of doing and practising knowledge is constructed in

and through the reciprocal subordination and denigration of less favoured and consequently delegitimised modes. Field observation must be systematic and have theoretical significance to be scientific. This distinguishes the activities of mere travellers from scientific exploring and discovery (152). Stoddart fails to analyse this as a process of constructing certain knowledges as scientifically legitimate, and therefore one which is politically charged at its very core, since it rests on a policing of the boundaries of what is and is not admitted into the realms of the properly knowable. His own account of the process is normatively at one with the notions of objectivity and science that were successfully institutionalised in this period. Stoddart accepts the self-understanding of those who 'won' that they were being properly scientific, and that therein lay the cause of their success. The institutionalisation and professionalisation of geography are processes which delimit certain objects as knowable and determines who can know them - this much one can glean from Stoddart's reconstructions, but the full implications of this are held in check by the commitments which underpin his account.

Stoddart foregrounds the experience of the world's diversity and difference as central to his vision of the geographical enterprise. For Stoddart, the specificity of geography as a science arises from the particular relation that it takes to this diversity - its commitment to gaining objective and systematic knowledge of it. This involves the exclusion of certain other ways of approaching the world, those which are insufficiently scientific (1986:152-3), and in this we see how the geographical object is defined in particular ways. Stoddart insists that exploration and discovery are "central in concept as well

as execution to our whole endeavour.” (154). These practices contain, in their very essence as practical activities, the indispensable qualities which enable a proper appreciation and comprehension of the world in its diversity, an appreciation meant to be scientific, objective, and, not least, humanitarian. Stoddart is therefore faced with the dilemma of somehow separating geographical exploration and discovery from their location in the projects of European colonial expansion. He locates the real essence of geography in a set of activities that were thoroughly interwoven with this expansion, and yet also wants to insist that these formed the basis of the objectivity of the New Geography of the late-nineteenth century. To pull off this unlikely balancing act, he adopts two strategies. In aggressively reasserting the centrality of exploration and discovery, he largely avoids any discussion of the relation between these practices and colonialism, which one might legitimately hypothesise is rather more than contingent. When he does entertain the implications of this connection, he insists that an understanding of exploration and discovery as geographical practices cannot be “too closely rooted in specific historical and geographical conditions.” (1986:156). He wants to understand these practices with a greater degree of generality. Here we have a curious situation indeed, as too much historical and geographical specificity is found to be problematic for the proper historical and contextual appreciation of the geographical enterprise.

The principles proclaimed by Stoddart, of a geography committed to humanistic ideals founded upon an appreciation of the physical and human world’s essential diversity, are presented as being best realised through a

resurrection of the spirit of exploration and discovery committed to the attainment of objective truth, which is considered to represent the best of eighteenth and nineteenth century European geography. These favoured means are invoked wholly uncritically, and in a thoroughly ahistorical fashion. The contradiction between proclaimed intent and chosen means condemns this project to simply reiterating the blindnesses characteristic of the past.

Avoiding an analysis of the historically specific construction of the forms of activity to which he appeals and of how far it is meaningful to talk of these practices as having a 'generality' that escapes their specific cultural and geopolitical conditions, this *ahistoricism* is accompanied by a *depoliticisation* that Stoddart effects in his discussion of the tradition of 'social concern' which he argues has a long history in geography (1986:128-41). Marshalling the names of Humboldt and Darwin alongside those of Kropotkin and Reclus under the general heading of 'social concern' is a rather drastic homogenisation of very diverse figures. That Humboldt or Darwin may have expressed personal concern over slavery, for example, is a different issue from the political effectivity of their work, and tells us little about the systematic idioms in which this concern was articulated. Only by privileging these individual's own self-conceptions, and justifying this by an historicist refusal to impose "the explanatory whims of an evanescent present on an increasingly distant past" (1991:486), can bastions of their respective national establishments be so easily identified with anarchist revolutionaries. Once again an ahistorical indifference to context emerges here.

The same issues arise in Stoddart's 'Geography - A European Science' (1982), another clarion call for geographers to realise their proper heritage, which outlines those features which constitute geography's status as science. In identifying taxonomic classification, realism in description, use of the comparative method, and objectivity, as the practices that were by the mid-nineteenth century the foundations of a properly scientific geography, Stoddart seems unaware or uninterested in the fact that these practices might be interpreted somewhat differently - as perhaps being so thoroughly implicated in and constituted by processes of colonial exploitation and dominance as to preclude any simple extrapolation of neutral general principles of their functioning. Once again, in this account Stoddart *shows* but does not *analyse* the significance of how the emergence of what became scientific geography rested on the exclusion and suppression of certain specified forms of knowing and understanding the world. His central question is quite simple: "when did *truth* become our central concern?" (291). The answer - during the course of the European encounter with 'other' peoples and with the fact of human cultural plurality in the process of colonialism - is relayed without any consideration at all as for just what this context might entail for the conception of disinterested 'truth' that we have inherited from it, and to which Stoddart remains steadfastly committed. Accurate charting and mapping, realism in illustration, classification, comparative method are all presented as the practices that distinguish geography as a science. That they may also be understood as technologies of surveillance, control, and domination, a simple

enough implication of their status as *European* as he describes it, is not explored.⁴

The limitations of Stoddart's project are made most evident in this essay. But here, too, an alternative direction is hinted at. In calling attention to how thoroughly certain techniques and practices were implicated in European expansion, and by the very mode in which he fails to address this issue, he leaves before our very eyes enough evidence to suggest an alternative interpretation. Take for example the issue of the 'comparative method'. This is taken to exemplify geography's ascendance to the status of science. And this is so particularly in so far as it is applied to the 'study of man':

"It is surely the extension of scientific methods of observation, classification and comparison to peoples and societies that made our own subject possible." (293).

While one might certainly agree with this, it is possible to interpret it somewhat differently than as being the thoroughly progressive event that Stoddart takes it to be. The ways observation, classification, and comparison were used in myriad practices of surveillance, domination, and subjection is not considered in his account. Stoddart comments that it was by the adoption of scientific methods such as these that a subjective, idyllic conception of non-Europeans presented during the first encounters in the South Pacific in the late-eighteenth century was, by the mid-nineteenth century replaced by the "objectivity with which Darwin describes the Fuegians during the voyage of

⁴ Gregory (1994:16-33) provides a reading of Stoddart's work which overlaps closely with my own here.

the Beagle in 1833.” (ibid.). It is worth reproducing the passage from Darwin that is considered representative of this new objectivity:

“whilst going on shore, we pulled alongside a canoe with 6 Fuegians. I never saw more miserable creatures; stunted in their growth, their hideous faces bedaubed with white paint and quite naked. One full aged woman absolutely so, the rain and spray were dripping from her body. Their red skins filthy and greasy, their hair entangled, their voices discordant, their gesticulation violent and without dignity. Viewing such men, one could hardly make oneself believe that they are fellow creatures placed in the same world. I can scarcely imagine that there is any spectacle more interesting and worthy of reflection, than one of these unbroken savages.”⁵

This is the “new attitude to man and his works” (ibid.) that, for Stoddart, characterises geography’s new scientific status, a status established by a break with a pre-scientific past in favour of an objectivity infused with social concern. One can only wonder at Stoddart’s failure to comment on the logic of racial and cultural supremacy that animates the above passage, and his blindness to the political and ethical implications of any objective practice of knowledge production that resembles his chosen example. If this is objective, then just what does this example tell us about this form of objectivity? The contradiction between humanist rhetoric and the wider structures of understanding and comprehension in which it is articulated is quite evident,

⁵ From ‘*Charles Darwin’s diary of the voyage of the H.M.S. “Beagle”*’ (1839), reproduced in Stoddart, 1982:293.

and Stoddart is able to contain it only at the cost of systematically avoiding any critical examination of the full socio-historical conditions in which this type of geographical knowledge was produced. In seeking to offer an alternative to the 'imperialist' explanation of the emergence of geography as a discipline (cf. 1986:128-9), by offering a view of an enterprise driven by humanistic considerations of the equality of Man, Stoddart only succeeds in pointing to how far such humanism was indeed part of, and not opposed to, processes of colonialism and imperialism.

This failure to address the ways in which what we now recognise as geography is in fact the product of conflict and contests that have far greater political, ethical, and epistemological consequences than Stoddart can entertain is most recently displayed in his exchange with Domosh over the possibility of a feminist historiography of geography (Domosh, 1991a, 1991b; Stoddart, 1991). Stoddart dismisses the significance of Domosh's account of how the knowledge of certain women was systematically excluded from the realm of nineteenth century geography. Again he betrays an unwillingness to submit to critical scrutiny the standards of what counted as proper knowledge at this time by repeating in the very same terms, and on the very same grounds, the act of exclusion that Domosh wishes to problematise. He explains how the women at issue are not relevant to his own work because they were only travellers, who produced only impressionistic accounts and not objective measurements, classifications, and collections. These women were not the type of scientific geographers with which he is concerned. He thus repeats his earlier argument (1986:152) that mere travel and field observation is distinct

from scientific exploration and discovery. He remains uninterested in asking critical questions about why, and with what consequences for the sanctioned knowledge of scientific geography, certain attitudes and orientations to natural and human diversity were marked as the sign of inadequately objective and disciplined knowledge. It is, he insists, historiographically irrelevant that geography in the nineteenth century was overwhelmingly the preserve of white, aristocratic men, although this claim, made to ward off the challenge of a feminist perspective, in fact belies the analysis he himself presents of the importance of the social composition of the Royal Geographical Society in the nineteenth century (41-76).

Stoddart's reply to Domosh is a testament of his unwillingness to seriously pursue the theme he had previously alluded to himself - that it is rival conceptions of what knowledge *is* that are at stake in doing the historiography of knowledge. There is no sign of any inclination to entertain the possibility, raised by Domosh, that what he affirms as real and proper geography might be better understood as a construction which rests on the power-charged exclusion of certain types and agents of knowledge, and that this exclusion involves the restriction and foreclosure of certain possible perspectives from which to comprehend and appreciate difference and diversity, the very essence of the geographical enterprise as he defines it. Just what are the implications of the institutionalisation of geography as a certain kind of sanctioned knowledge which, as a condition of its existence, excludes certain other possibilities? This question remains unasked by Stoddart, and thus his humanist project is betrayed by this failure to critically interrogate the full

implications of the production of geographical knowledge as a distinctively European science.

Science, Ideology, and Race

David Livingstone has in recent years been prolific in the production of historical work on geography which is explicitly framed as a contribution to, and a prime example of, a contextual history of geography (1979, 1984b, 1991a). He has produced accounts of the relation of geography to various social and intellectual contexts: medical and racial sciences (1987b, 1991c, 1992c); natural theology (1987a, 1991b); Darwinian and Lamarckian evolutionism (1984a; Cambell and Livingstone, 1983); 'pre-scientific' modes of thought (1990). This has culminated in the publication of *The Geographical Tradition* (1992b), easily the single most important product of the renewal of interest in the history of geography. Most recently Livingstone has led calls for an historical geography of ideas which addresses the spaces in which knowledge is produced (1994, 1995b). His work has recovered the extent of geography's connections with other scientific and intellectual realms, as well as bringing to light the different socio-political interests that have influenced geography in different ways. His work is the most significant substantive contribution to the 'new' contextual historiography of geography. A guiding principle of Livingstone's work is that the question of the identity of geography, of its essential nature or unity, must be suspended as the starting point for any study of the history of the discipline (Livingstone, 1990:369). This follows from the variety of contexts in which geographers and

geographical thought has been involved. His historiography is thus in marked contrast to Stoddart's, which continues to privilege a particular notion of what geography is and should be. Livingstone, ostensibly at least, makes no such claims.

Individuals remain the conceptual focus of Livingstone's reconstructions of the history of geographical thought and institutions. He explicitly chastises Hartshorne for separating knowledge from the knower, in so doing reaffirming that the intentions, motivations, and presuppositions of individual authors should be analytically privileged, and that they can moreover be recovered from the written record of their work. Discussing the way in which the activity of 'scientific travellers' of the nineteenth century was closely related to imperialism, this relation is understood in terms of what questions "impelled these adventurers", what were their "motives", "incentives", their "attitudes" (Livingstone, 1991a:172-3). These are the categories that organise and structure Livingstone's accounts of geography in colonial contexts. He is quite explicit in his insistence that "Victorian geography was intimately bound up with British expansionist policy overseas" (172), and yet this relation is framed in terms of the personal motives and inclinations of the dominant individuals in institutions of British geography. This is rendered in terms of "the interplay between geographical knowledge and imperial prejudices." (173). Livingstone presents the relations between geography and imperialism in terms of the unfortunate "imperialistic biases" of such figures as Roderick Murchison and Henry Bartle Frere (173-4). From this type of vocabulary we can begin to see the conception of science and of its

relations to social contexts that is at work in Livingstone's histories. Geography is constructed as a body of knowledge that was 'mobilised' and 'deployed' for the purposes of political 'legitimation'. This understanding of individuals concerned with the professionalisation of their subject, and of their relation to social contexts in terms of how far they were party to certain prejudices and biases, presupposes a strict conceptual distinction between "social and cognitive interests" (177), a distinction that pervades Livingstone's work. The way social context impinges on the cognitive realm is constructed around a series of subjective categories sharply distinguished from the proper concerns of knowledge, and also in terms of how knowledge was used by forces *outside* the strictly cognitive realm. This is the understanding that one gains from examining the rhetoric in which contexts and power relations are presented across the range of his historical studies. In resisting interpretations of geography's worldly history that would present it as "*just* social ideology writ large" (1992a:32), he refuses to analyse knowledge as carrying certain effects of social power by its very nature. To do so one need not reduce knowledge to a function of outside interests. Livingstone studiously avoids analysing the effects geographical knowledge has *as* knowledge, not just by virtue of it being used after the fact as legitimation by external forces. He suggests that admitting the social component of geography's history means we must "recognise that there is a *social* history of geographical ideas as well as a purely cognitive one." (ibid.). This formulation has the benefit of both enabling one to admit geography's worldly involvements while at the same time limiting the understanding of these so that they do not bear on the purely

cognitive claims and legitimacy of this form of knowledge. Social interests and social power bear upon the cognitive realm from the outside, using and deploying knowledge which remains nonetheless, in its cognitive essence, free from worldly interests or particularity.

The limitations and lacunae which can be traced in Livingstone's historical studies, and the implications they carry forward into present debates, can be traced to the particular construction of context in his work. The determination of the text/context relation as an inside/outside relation can be traced throughout Livingstone's substantive work, and his more explicitly methodological statements (1979). Texts are first to be returned to their original circumstances and contexts in order to establish precisely what the authors intended to communicate in them. However much Livingstone admits the possibility of these intentions perhaps not being realised, this is not conceptually tied to the very conditions of possibility for the intelligibility of those texts. A context is defined as being that from which the text originates, whether intentional act or social ground. The next step is to think about the ways that derivation, complication, and appropriation of meanings takes place - after the fact, as an external event, as something which befalls a text and the message it is meant to communicate from the outside. Livingstone fails to account for what it is about science, as such, that makes it radically deployable to social and political ends. This is consistently represented as an essentially external effect of its unfortunate entanglement with or manipulation by some force outside of it.

Texts are understood as both 'cognitive' and the product of individuals, that is, in both cases sharply distinguished from the 'social'. The issue of the relation between 'text' and 'context' figures large in the recent discussions of the direction of contextual histories of geography. Both Livingstone, and more recently Driver (1992:35), have insisted that the 'context' of nineteenth century geographical knowledge must be understood in ways more complex than suggested by those who would see ideas and concepts as "unproblematic reflections or functions of some extratextual real world." The target here is the supposed crudity of the few self-consciously 'materialist' accounts of the history of geography that have been produced (e.g. Hudson, 1977; Peet, 1985). Livingstone (1992b:29) laments the use of contextual approaches as "little more than an apologia for a politicized reduction that accords cognitive privilege - frequently in an unexamined fashion - to the socio-political side of the equation." He insists that texts and contexts are constituted reciprocally, in terms of "scientific text" and "social context" (1990:368). Context is the 'socio-political side of the equation'. By constructing 'context' as social, political, and ideological, 'text' is reciprocally determined as somehow non-social, as cognitive and scientific. For all the talk of the need to examine the ways texts and contexts are always interwoven, the actual historical analyses and the contemporary significances drawn from them both construct context as the outside from which essentially non-scientific effects insinuate themselves into science, contaminating it and diverting it from its proper disinterested path. The combined effect is not to transcend conventional understandings of

texts and contexts, but is part of an unstinting effort to unpick them, and to allocate to each its proper place.

Livingstone's recent accounts (1987b, 1991c, 1992c) of how geographical discourses of climate and racial difference have been closely interwoven underscore this point. Here, around the issue of how scientific questions about the acclimatisation of people and plants were constructed in specific socio-political contexts, he constructs an account that rests on the distinction between science and its "ideological context" (1987b:365). The issue of human acclimatisation "was a question that *impinged* on a range of *scientific* disciplines, was discussed in a variety of institutional settings, and was *conditioned* by *ideological allegiances*." (366 [emphasis added]). Livingstone nowhere enters into a discussion of the theoretical status that the categories 'science' and 'ideology' are meant to carry in this account. This use of 'ideology' enables him to admit the political and ethical stakes at play in the discourses he is analysing while avoiding any sustained examination of how and why knowledge, as knowledge, and not due to some external influence, was able to become implicated in apparently 'non-cognitive' processes. Livingstone documents at length the way issues of race or different attitudes to colonialism were entwined in discussions of climatology. He poses the relation between knowledge and these 'political' factors from a perspective concerned with identifying the external causes of internal, 'cognitive' developments. A variety of 'social' and 'institutional' factors, understood as 'independent' (382), are suggested as having 'conditioned' scientific knowledge, and Livingstone suggests that a future study of disputes around the issue of

acclimatisation will indicate whether they were resolved by “social or cognitive factors.” (ibid.). Again, the clear implication of this type of framing of contextual relations is of a strict analytical distinction between a realm of cognitive science impinged upon from the outside in different ways by other social or ideological factors. Having identified the entanglement of geographical knowledge in certain social practices, Livingstone attempts to undo this knot of relations into separable strands. ‘Imperialism’ is thus taken as a ‘non-scientific’ context for acclimatisation issues. National context, “attitudes to imperialism”, and the debates between monogenism and polygenism are all regarded as non-scientific factors influencing this scientific realm which are more or less “ideologically biased” (386). This rhetoric of ideology, non-science, subjectivist bias, and prejudice, is how Livingstone poses his discussions of the context of scientific geography. His account of the presence of an explicit concern with race in geographical discourses thus reveals an uncritical projection of present liberal convictions about the sources of oppression backwards onto the past, this from the most consistent champion of contextualised understanding. He has described in some detail how the “vocabulary of science” has been used “as a legitimating tool in the discussion of ethnic/racial questions.” (1992a:37). Yet, despite talking of science as a social practice and of the inevitability of the ways that “social ideology insinuates its way into the very heart of scientific knowledge” (38), in the absence of any coherent analyses of the structure of knowledge production as such, these remain rather hollow sounding pronouncements.

While Livingstone's work overcomes the glaring omissions and deafening silences that characterise so much extant history of geography when it comes to the thorny issue of its illiberal past, the use of a rhetoric of ideology and subjective bias to articulate these issues is a way of both admitting and at the same time diluting the importance of the centrality of unequal power relations in geographical knowledge. Discussing this relation of knowledge and power in a colonial context in terms of *ideology*, *bias*, and *prejudice* distinct from cognitive science has the effect of distancing such situations from any contemporary resonance at all: one can assuage one's liberal conscience at the same time as being safe in the knowledge that such biases and prejudices are a thing of the past. Contextualisation rendered in this way acts as a means of systematically avoiding any analysis of how the product of knowledge, in its very structure as a cognitive, scientific exercise, might instantiate specific power relations, not from the outside, but as a principle of its very constitution and functioning. There is thus an unresolved tension in Livingstone's accounts: social interests and ideology are found to reach to the core of scientific knowledge, and yet this core is itself neither the site nor source of power and ideology, but the non-social cognitive arena that is manipulated by forces from the outside. What makes geography so deployable and so manipulable is not considered. It is these unasked questions which are marked in Livingstone's work by a vocabulary of 'manipulation' and 'legitimation' and a rhetoric of cognitive science and social ideology.

The adherence to a notion of science as a non-social, cognitive realm is internally related to the moralising form of criticism that Livingstone produces

of various episodes in geography's history in which a neutral, disinterested knowledge becomes the vehicle for outside interests, introducing impurities into a realm that nevertheless retains an ideal and pure core. The presence of race in discussions of climate is a case of how "the language of science became the moralising vehicle for conveying to the public the racial judgements of an intellectual elite." (1991c:424). Science is here separated from the so-called moralising discourse of race, for which it can become nonetheless the 'vehicle'. The question of what enables their articulation is not addressed. This construction of climatology as a 'moral' discourse appears to be a radical critical gesture, but is, again, a form of accepting and neutralising the more disturbing implications of the appearance of racial themes within the history of geographical knowledge. 'Moral climatology' is presented as a means by which scientific discourse has been used to legitimise and advocate "racial ideology" (428) since the beginning of the nineteenth century, an example of the "moralistic marshalling of science in the cause of racial apologetic", and of how various sciences were "susceptible to moral manipulation" which "enabled the vocabulary of science to be employed in the conveying of a racial ideology from the intimate arena of the academy to the public space of public policy." (428-9). What emerges is an account of 'racial ideology' emanating from outside of science, using the latter for its own ends. One might be led to ask, although Livingstone is silent on the matter, why and what it is that made the putative science of geography, its practices, and techniques, so "entirely suited to the colonial project" (1987b:175), and so susceptible to 'moral manipulation'? What is called for is not the moralistic

denunciation of improper distortions, but a criticism which accounts for their production as internal to geographical knowledge.

Livingstone's work goes to great lengths to establish just how thoroughly and consistently geographical knowledge has been involved in practices of exploitation and domination. Yet by framing this in terms of the moralistic marshalling of science in the interests of ideology, his rhetoric neutralises the impact on contemporary geographical practice of the deep and myriad connections with social power that he *describes* but does not *analyse*. He summarises one review of geographical interest in racial themes by suggesting that from a careful study of such work "the systematic relations between scientific theory and social practice are all too plain." (1984b:283). Yet this comment is made in place of, not as preliminary to, any explicit account of that system. If it is self-evident that there is a relation between science and society, descriptions of different examples of this relation do not amount to an adequate analysis of the precise systematic nature of that relation. By presenting discussions of racial character and human nature as 'moral idioms' which find their way into geography from non-scientific discourses and practices, Livingstone avoids the implications of the fact that in the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth century, racial discourses were pre-eminently scientific, not 'ideological'. Race was a fundamental organising principle of knowledge from the late-eighteenth century onwards, and as such was always an implicit form of geographical knowledge, in so far as race was the category through which European science dealt with the increasingly abundant and varied evidence of the geographical diversity of

human societies that followed from European expansion. Geography's claims to scientific status throughout this period arise from, not in spite of, its close relations with racial sciences.⁶

Defending Tradition with Liberal Pluralism

Livingstone's work represents a thorough and erudite examination of how geographical knowledge has been engaged in debates about theology, scientific rationality, race, and society, which succeeds in demystifying the vision of a parochial and isolated discipline. It demonstrates the variety of ways in which geography has always been a 'worldly' discipline, closely involved with socio-economic and political processes. But Livingstone does no more than *describe* this situation. He gives no systematic theoretical or analytical account of the constitution of knowledge in these circumstances, and thereby evades asking the most challenging questions about what is at stake for our understanding of knowledge once we come to realise how closely articulated it has always been with these other social practices. It is this lack of theoretical analysis that is the condition of his pluralist conception of contemporary geography, in which genuine conflict is effaced from the cognitive realm.

Livingstone suspends the question of what geography *is* in order to undertake his study of the history of geography, but he has nonetheless been

⁶ Livingstone's treatment of racial science confirms Young's (1994a) observations concerning the tendency to consider Victorian attitudes to race as a matter to be dismissed on moral grounds, and likewise fails to consider racial science as not just providing the moral basis but being the *theoretical discourse* of nineteenth century colonialism.

quite explicit about the conclusions for contemporary geography which follow from his investigations, explaining what geography *should be* on the basis of his historical work. In his comments on the contemporary relevance of this type of historiography, we can see the effects of the failure to attend to the play of social power which is internally and constitutively peculiar to scientific institutions. He concludes an account of geography in relation to sixteenth and seventeenth century thought by addressing the question of how the focus on geography's past informs contemporary debates in geography about foundationalism and postmodernism. With the 'decline of foundationalism' in philosophy, and the abundance of evidence of how the definition of geography has changed and varied, Livingstone declares (1990:370) that from now on "geographers will have to acknowledge that warranted knowledge is relative to a body of beliefs, not a body of certainties." The end of foundationalism is not understood as throwing us towards a fully historical understanding of knowledge as a product of determinable social relations. Rather, in classically pragmatist fashion, it implies that knowledge is just a matter of competing beliefs. In the value ascribed to 'belief', a category of moral consciousness, the individualist and humanist foundation of Livingstone's understanding of the historicity of knowledge is again made evident. This relativist reading of certain philosophical issues neutralises the full social and politico-ethical consequences which might follow from exploring the structural relations between forms of knowledge and power, positing instead the existence of different and incompatible positions as mere matters of personal volition. Such a structural exploration is in fact foreclosed by such a framing. The systematic

avoidance of any concern with the structural effects of the unequal power relations instantiated in knowledge production is underlined in his pronouncement that the realisation that knowledge is a matter of belief, and not of epistemological certitude, will inevitably “lead to pluralism in the geographical academy.” (ibid.). This means that the cognitive rights of all must be respected (1992b:345-6). This ‘postmodernist’ pluralism reveals how the silence on the instantiation of power in geographical knowledge that characterises his historical studies is indeed closely related to the orientation on contemporary disputes that such work informs.

The “plural rocks of the historical knowledge” will ensure the fruitlessness of any attempt to define the essential nature of geography, since “geography has meant different things to different people in different places and thus the ‘nature’ of geography is always negotiated [...] The task of geography’s historians, at least in part, is thus to ascertain how and why particular practices and procedures come to be accounted geographically legitimate and hence normative at different moments in time and different spatial settings.” (1991a:335). These are indeed admirable guidelines. However, Livingstone’s own work falls short of the type of analyses required if we are to discern the processes whereby knowledge is negotiated and normed. There is, then, a contradiction between the terms in which he interprets his own work, and what that work actually points towards. While he effectively articulates the ways that academic definition and boundary setting has always been “an exercise in the wielding of cultural power” (ibid.), thus raising the issue of the “politics of definitional discourse” (336), it soon

becomes clear that he still holds to a position that sees this imbrication of power as, while perhaps inevitable, being really rather unfortunate and something to be minimised. He insists (337) that the contextual history of geography he favours will intervene in contemporary disputes in geography through its “relativising effects”: i.e. it will work to diffuse them. Here is how he summarises in familiar terms the fruits of the historical study of geography’s past, which reveals an ongoing ‘conversation’ between different perspectives:

“Geography [...] has meant different things to different people at different times and in different places. It has employed different vocabularies to suit different purposes - from magic to theology to science and art. Sometimes these discourses have been in conflict; at other times they have been mutually reinforcing. Sometimes the conversations have admitted a range of geographers; sometimes only a select group were allowed to take part.” (1992a:35).

But from this history of an enterprise always infused with effects of power, exclusion, and conflict between different perspectives and practices, Livingstone draws a peculiarly indifferent conclusion. An inversion is inscribed in his interpretation of the present consequences of his historical studies, one reiterated at the end of *The Geographical Tradition*. Here, he argues that we must recognise the essentially contested character of the geographical tradition at all times, but this recognition is not a preliminary to taking up a position within the contemporary terrain of conflict. Instead, it is

offered as the prerequisite for an effort to protect the 'tradition' from the most pernicious effects of those conflicts:

“To disregard its contested character will mean sacrificing the history and future of geography to partisan apologists who strive to monopolize the conversation in order to serve their own sectarian interests.” (1992b:358).

From the proposition that we should understand events and ideas in their own historical context, we seem to have slipped into a position whereby different perspectives are incommensurable and beyond any form of critical comparison. A history of power infused episodes is in this way made to support a thoroughly depoliticised vision of the contemporary academy.

Livingstone's presentation of geography as always having been an 'essentially contested enterprise' would seem to call for an indication of how it remains so today, and invite the taking up of a position within this contested field. But instead, he transposes a thoroughly power-laden history into a contemporary call for pluralism, and his insistence on respecting the cognitive integrity of all comers presupposes an external perspective of studied indifference towards any and all of them. This gesture of figuring the contemporary scene as a pluralist conversation on the basis of a history of a contested enterprise is made possible by the way in which Livingstone constructs his accounts of that history - in terms of essentially external relations between geographical knowledge and relations of social power. This representation enables him at one and the same time to describe geography's illiberal past and present this as having unavoidably relativist consequences.

Livingstone insists that just as in the past geographical knowledge has always been used to serve particular interests, so today specific interests are at stake in disputes over what sort of geography should be taught and fostered (1991a:337). But it is precisely this interested character that he deplors, as the sign of improper partisan impostors impinging upon the field of knowledge. Out of all this talk of interests, beliefs, and the 'politics of definitional discourse', Livingstone constructs a favoured vision of *depoliticised* and *disinterested* academic pursuit. His pluralism is little else than a revamped liberal dream of harmony which rests on erasing effects of inequality and domination, one which makes concessions to certain new currents of thought, admitting them entrance into the geographical academy on condition that they understand that their entry is premised on giving up any presumption of being able to call into question the claims of other perspectives and knowledges. And this is a liberalism much more parochial than Stoddart's, who at least wants to force geographer's to address their worldly responsibilities. Livingstone presents such worldly connections as rather unfortunate and at best contingent. His primary concern is with proper academic behaviour.

If the singular essence of geography is no longer an issue, this is at the cost of insulating the essence of knowledge as such from any constitutive relation with its 'outside'. The relativising effect of studying geography's past is such that we are "prevented from judging the past in the light of the present." (1990:369). Rather, there must be "a greater recognition of the integrity of each of these diverse discourses *in their own terms.*" (337). Presenting contextualisation as having to respect terms of reference for

understanding the world which are not the same as one's own (whether because of historical distance or contemporary position), on the basis that each perspective represents a separate system of presuppositions and 'control beliefs', begs the question raised by all such historicist pronouncements: how can one know, indeed how does it even make sense to propose, that a different context is *so* different that one's own terms of reference and comprehension are rendered meaningless in relation to it. To make the identification of any period or perspective as different, one must posit some principle of translation by which the difference can be registered as difference. This implies an openness of other perspectives to one's own, not an absolute or universal principle of translatability, but some means by which historical situations can be intelligible enough for them to be recognised as being *significantly* different from our own (Billinge *et al*, 1984). Historical work is only conceivable on the condition that the past remains, in some sense, open and accessible to us, intelligible from our perspective. Our aim must be not to condemn the past from contemporary perspectives, but to address the present by attending critically to the past at those very points at which its continuities and differences from the present are most resonant.

In Livingstone's work, contextualisation as a form of historicist relativism returns to the present with a vengeance, evacuating any concern with taking a critical position or declaring one's own interests (Livingstone, 1990:369). As in his historical studies, power in the modern academy is reduced to a pernicious, unwelcome effect of partisanship which subverts proper disinterested perspectives. In his rendering of liberal pluralist

postmodernism, “[w]e will have no option but to live with positivist geography, Marxist geography, humanistic geography, Islamic geography, structurationist geography, Christian geography, feminist geography, a people’s geography and on and on. Each will be within their cognitive rights to hold theories that comport with their system of control beliefs.” (370). This is a pluralism which sees disputes in the realm of knowledge as matters of incommensurable and equally valid cognitive belief systems, thereby erasing from that realm any sign of their being anything important really at stake. This liberal rhetoric suffers from the same fate of all such pluralism - it recognises differences, but homogenises them, failing to identify which of these differences are effects of real social antagonisms contradictions that preclude any comfortable cohabitation between them (Haraway, 1991:160-1). Power is erased from the institutions of knowledge production by presenting all differences of perspective as mere matters of volition and belief, rather than as *contradictory* differences. Power is figured across the whole range of Livingstone’s work as essentially external: as ‘ideology’, ‘prejudice’, ‘bias’, ‘partisanship’, and ‘sectarianism’. Or just ‘context’.

This evacuation of worldly power from the arena of contemporary intellectual disputes is essential to the ethic of pluralism that Livingstone expounds. It is surely inadequate to understand different hyphenated geographies as just ‘belief systems’; we lose any sense of how some of these positions are far from compatible with each other not because they hold to different ‘beliefs’, but because they are fashioned out of an antagonistic interrelation with each other, most recently in relation to feminist geography,

which is not just another interest group seeking inclusion. In this and other cases, it is a matter of explicitly transforming geography, what sort of knowledge it is and how it is done, and identifying practices that are directly inimical to the production of certain types of emancipatory outcomes. But Livingstone denies the validity of such a project. Inclusion in the geographical academy must come at the cost of giving up the right to call into question the 'integrity' of other positions. This autotelic legitimacy of all perspectives is the condition of inclusion of any of them: each has to abandon any claims to worldly connections and commitments that would foreground any critical perspective. Livingstone forecloses any responsible account of the politics of knowledge through this attempt to stave off the challenges of certain perspectives. If geography is considered to be a series of 'conversations' between different positions, genuine *dialogue* is made impossible in Livingstone's formulation since no one has the right to question or to interrupt different interlocutors (cf. 1992b:347-58). This is suffocatingly polite conversation, where it turns out that in fact all the participants are required to be nothing other than soliloquists, engaged in a veritable dialogue of the deaf.

Only from a position that pretends to be external to all particular perspectives can one pronounce that they are all equally valid. Livingstone's presentation of epistemological and critical relativism as the inevitable consequence of both a history of contested viewpoints and of postmodern philosophy is essentially a defensive gesture. In reaction to the emergence of radical political perspectives which challenge received notions of what geography is and what it might be, this form of pluralism rewrites these

antagonistic positions as merely distinctive modes of belief. Livingstone gives with one hand while taking away with the other, and the loss is much greater than the gain. Radical perspectives are granted equal rights and legitimacy in a utopian pluralistic academy, but only at the cost of renouncing any claims to have critical purchase on other approaches. What remains unquestioned is liberalism itself - participants are allowed entry into the game on condition that they admit the legitimacy of the existing rules. That these rules of the game might be what are 'essentially contested' is not even admitted as a possibility. Only from a position in line with the *status quo* can one represent such differences as matters of mere personal choice, and this representation is an interested obfuscation of real conflicts. Livingstone's pluralism, bolstered by a contextualised history of geography, can thus be identified as one of the means by which contemporary geography has endeavoured to put "the radical genie back in the bottle." (Smith, 1989:116). Livingstone's remarks about the ongoing criticism of the positivist legacy in geography bear this out. He argues, with respect to both the humanistic and radical critiques, that "it is still much too early to attempt any rigorous contextual elucidation of these most recent moves." (1992b:329). This is nothing short of a refusal to *take sides* within what is still the contemporary 'context' of disputes in the geographical academy, and in this unwillingness to take up a position in amongst this terrain of contestation, contextualisation is revealed as a means of distancing and diffusing the conflicts that traverse arenas of knowledge production, both past and present. From this position, Livingstone takes it upon himself to arbitrate on what is proper (e.g. 1995a). This yearning for a position above the fray is,

in turn, an indication that it is the present constitution of the discipline which remains sacrosanct in this version of a 'necessary pluralism'. Attempts to alter the future direction of geography are dismissed as the improper impositions of 'outside' interests, and in this claim, there is a more significant denial of any 'public' or 'social' accountability, of any *worldly responsibility*, for the Tradition(s) at all.

Livingstone's form of contextualisation precludes an account of the internal power relations and social effects of science *as* science, knowledge *as* knowledge. The real silences in his work are at those points at which a cacophonous rhetoric of 'mutual constitution', 'ideology', and 'manipulation' arise, marking the points at which an analysis not undertaken by him might in fact commence. We need a shift of attention if we are to apprehend the power relations not just in science and knowledge, but *of* science and knowledge as such. To address this question, we need to arrive at an understanding of how 'texts' are always already 'social texts'; or, how context is always in the text, not just around it. The sociality of texts arises from that which structures them from the very start:

“At this level it is not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science, as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal regime of power.” (Foucault, 1986:54-55).

To undertake this sort of examination, we need to pose explicitly the problem of texts and contexts, of the play of power peculiar to knowledge, and of a

mode of *reading* appropriate to its apprehension. It is to this task that we turn in the following three chapters.

2

COMMUNITIES OF METHOD

Our craft is all in reading the other: gaps, inverses, undersides; the veiled; the dark, the buried, the feminine; alterities. Only part of the truth, such a reading asserts, resides in what writing says of the hitherto unsaid; for the rest, its truth lies in what it dare not say for the sake of its own safety, or in what it does not know about itself: in its silences. It is a mode of reading which, subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn. Is it a version of utopianism (or pastoralism) to look forward (or backward) to the day when the truth will be (or was) what is said, not what is not said, when we will hear (or heard) music as sound upon silence, not silence between sounds?

J. M. Coetzee White Writing

Locating Theory

However pluralised ‘geography’ may become under the revisionist impulse, the work of both Stoddart and Livingstone remains confined within the problematic of the history of geography. To raise the question of the discursive construction of objects and subjects of knowledge requires the suspension of the continuist assumption that underwrites the critical charge carried by recent work on the relations between geography and empire. In order to displace the problematic of the history of geography as the organising frame of such enquiry, in this chapter I shall consider the theoretical protocols which follow from explicitly constructing the object of historical research as *colonial discourse*.

Much of the impetus behind the recent refashioning of theoretical agendas in the social sciences and humanities comes from the widespread diagnosis that the present historical conjuncture is characterised by a ‘crisis of representation’, a notion which has underwritten discussions of

postmodernism. Young (1990:19) observes that postmodernism is the symptom of “European culture’s awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world.” This informs an understanding of recent intellectual currents such as post-structuralism, re-read as critically engaging with Eurocentrism, as responses to a challenge which emanates from some other place. Most standard accounts of postmodernism and postmodernity fail to register this dimension of contemporary cultural and intellectual change. Rather, as Slater (1993) argues, narratives of postmodernism work to re-centre all that they proclaim to have de-centred by continuing to present the West as a self-contained entity sufficient to itself. Accounts written from within the analytical straightjacket of the “occidental enclosure” are only able to imagine the critique of Western power as originating from within the West. The effect of this mode of reasoning is to reproduce the long-standing denial of the existence of agents of knowledge and traditions of critique located in the non-Western ‘periphery’.

Brennan (1989b:4) observes that the history of our times is the history of decolonisation, and that this requires us to recast understandings of events that are routinely taken to be “hermetic to the experience of the West” against the background of anti-colonial movements. Likewise, for West (1987:194), the decolonisation of the Third World is “a world-historical process that has fundamentally changed not only our conceptions of ourselves and those constituted as “others” (non-Europeans, women, gays, lesbians) but, more important, our understanding of how we have constructed and do construct conceptions of ourselves and others as selves, subjects, and peoples.” This

foregrounds the degree to which the emergence of 'cultural politics' as it now understood was first explicitly articulated by political movements struggling against colonial and imperialist hegemony in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. For Ngugi (1986:3), the most enduring legacy of colonialism was the 'cultural bomb' wielded to "annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their language, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves." Given such an understanding of the means of colonial domination, regaining control of the means of collective self-definition is identified as a central form of political struggle for emancipation, the most succinct statement on this matter being Cabral's observation that "if imperialist domination has the vital need to practise cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an *act of culture*." (1980:143).

If colonialism and imperialism are processes which involve the denial, denigration, and negation of the cultural traditions of subjugated groups, then it is necessary to acknowledge the degree to which resistance to those processes has taken the form of what Bhabha calls a struggle for 'the historical right to signify.' (1992:49). This struggle works to transform sites of enunciation, the way in which representations and significations are articulated, and the direction in which they are addressed, and this is captured in West's final words noted above, which imply that the 'struggle for the right to signify' has not simply altered the content of representations of different cultures by challenging stereotypes and overcoming prejudices, but has also fundamentally transformed our understandings of how processes of

representation themselves work. If one dimension of this transformation is the displacement of mimetic conceptions of representation by understandings of representation as having a constitutive role in social relations (Bhabha, 1984b; Hall, 1988), then the corollary of this has to be an appreciation that the so-called 'crisis of representation' is better thought of as a symptom of previously marginalised groups engaging in a struggle *for* representation (Jay, 1994).

The trajectory of theoretical curiosity in human geography has recently crossed paths with 'postcolonial theory'. (e.g. Blunt and Rose, 1994; Crush, 1994; Gregory, 1994, 1995; Radcliffe, 1993; Rose, 1995a). Yet there appears to be increasing scepticism regarding the widespread "metaphorization of postcolonialism" in the humanities and social sciences (Suleri, 1992b:759).¹ McClintock (1992) suggests that the use of the *term* postcolonialism as a descriptive label for the contemporary historical condition undermines the impulse behind the *theory* often referred to by this name: "If "postcolonial" theory has sought to challenge the grand march of Western historicism with its entourage of binaries (self-other, metropolis-colony, center-periphery, etc.), the term "post-colonialism" nonetheless re-orientes the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial/post-colonial." (85). She argues that the

¹ Slemon (1994:17) describes postcolonialism as a "shimmering talisman that confers legitimacy" on various forms of academic work, and his account of just what this term has come to stand for is worth quoting at length because it gives a sense of the complexity, and incoherence, of the fields which are now identified by this label: "It has been used as a way of ordering critiques of totalizing forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of 'class': as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism (and conversely, as the condition from which those two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge); as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a Third World intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourses of colonial power; as an oppositional form of 'reading practice'; and - and this was my first encounter with the term - as the name for a category of 'literary' activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called 'Commonwealth' literary studies." (16-17).

vocabulary of postcolonialism can easily reproduce an essentially colonial gesture in so far as it continues to define the history of formerly colonised territories solely in terms of the event of colonialism: “If the theory promises a decentering of history in hybridity, syncretism, multi-dimensional time, and so forth, the singularity of the term effects a re-centering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance.” (86). The tendency of discussions of postcolonialism to slide towards the subordination of complexity beneath an all-embracing theoretical label signals “a reluctance to surrender the privilege of seeing the world in terms of a single and ahistorical abstraction.” (ibid.).²

Following Hountondji (1992:244), we might suggest that the knowledge and literature of diverse societies becomes subject, under the hegemony of the postcolonial paradigm, to a form of *theoretical extraversion*. Postcolonial literary theory can easily reproduce the move by which the Third World becomes the site of a certain kind of basic literary or cultural production, which is returned to the West and inserted into theoretical systems and paradigms developed there. Works are selectively filtered according to interests and tastes which continue to be determined in the West (Brennan, 1989a, Dhareshwar, 1990). Such a mode of reception can work to efface the theoretical impulse of work written in different political and institutional situations (Harlow, 1990). Thus, Pathak (1992:433-4) argues that it is

² For other critical commentaries on ‘postcolonialism’ see: Ahmad, 1992, 1995; Appiah, 1991a; Dirlik, 1994; Frankenburg and Mani, 1993; Mishra and Hodge, 1991; Mukherjee, 1990; and Shohat, 1992. It would be mistaken to consider all of these critiques to be of a piece. As the reaction to Ahmad’s *In Theory* illustrates, theoretical differences turn upon disputed and often incompatible versions of what counts as ‘political’ in an intellectual arena (Parry, 1993b; Kaviraj, 1993; Brennan, 1994b; *Public Culture* 6:1, 1993).

necessary to resist the hegemony of certain anti-referential orthodoxies and to insist upon 'reading referentially', to recover the recognisable history of violence, subordination, and resistance which texts produced in colonial situations necessarily inscribe. Likewise, Slemon (1990) insists on retaining a sense of the referential purchase of textuality, where this reference is to the work of subject-constitution effected by colonialist discourses.

It is the lack of specificity associated with 'postcolonialism' that makes it conceptually problematic. In contrast, Shohat (1992:103) suggests that 'colonial discourse' has a greater degree of specificity which enables it to be critically addressed in more meaningful manner (cf. Barker *et al*, 1994:2-4). Furthermore, since Slemon (1994) argues that the problematic qualities of contemporary discourses of postcolonialism are the outcome of the constitutive relation between these fields and the unresolved tensions within the more coherent field of colonial discourse analysis, I shall confine my attention in what follows to a critical elaboration of this field.

Hulme (1986:2) characterises colonial discourse as "an ensemble of linguistically based practices unified by their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships, an ensemble that would combine the most formulaic and bureaucratic of official documents [...] with the most non-functional and unprepossessing of romantic novels." This formulation rests on the recognition that during the period of European territorial expansion a whole array of institutions produced different forms of knowledge through which the non-European world was discursively produced for Europe. The emergence of this field is dependent upon what Greenblatt (1991:6) calls the

“reproduction and circulation of mimetic capital” with which territorial expansion and appropriation was associated. This refers not only to the vast accumulation of knowledge and representations which came to be stored in the archives of imperialist powers, but to the processes by which these archives were in turn called upon as the material means by which to produce further representations. So, for example, Richards (1993) argues that British imperialism supported a fantasy of comprehensive and complete knowledge, an ultimately self-defeating impulse to collect, collate, and categorise information and data on a universal basis. This impulse involved not just the collection but more specifically the centralisation of knowledge, in which institutions such as the British Museum and the Royal Geographical Society played a crucial role.

Colonial discourse theory takes this effort to collect and systematise knowledge as its object of analysis. The emergence of this field is the culmination of the project implied in Said's *Orientalism* (1978a), by which a diverse set of institutions and the representations produced by them are provided with a certain degree of coherence by being subjected to interpretative protocols drawn from literary studies. Theoretically constituting these representations as *discourses* is a way of making the construction of subjectivities the object of analysis. Colonial discourse theory has “undertaken to redirect contemporary critical reflections on colonialism (and its aftermath) towards the language used by the conquerors, imperial administrators, travellers and missionaries. For it was through language - the rhetoric, figures of speech, and discursive formations - that Europeans have understood and

governed themselves and the peoples they subjected overseas.” (Seed, 1991:183). From such a perspective, colonial discourses are effective practices in the exercise of power in so far as they construct certain subject positions as the norm by reference to which representations of difference are encoded (Mohanty, 1982:336).

If ‘colonial discourse’ implies at once a theoretical, methodological, and political orientation towards issues of subjectivity, involving the imposition of a certain degree of uniformity across diverse fields, it also effects a widening of perspective at the same time. A wide range of institutions and practices involved in the production of representations of colonial authority and resistance can be constructed as colonial discourses, including scientific writing, historical documents, official reports, literature and poetry, the visual and plastic arts, and academic discourses such as anthropology, geography, or linguistics. The range and diversity of sites through which colonial subjectivities were constructed and contested is the condition for the interdisciplinary impulse of colonial discourse analysis. Yet, in a curious sense colonial discourse analysis remains parasitic upon the appetite for knowledge that European colonial and imperial expansion fostered, being in the ambiguous position of reactivating this archive in order to contribute to the critique of the residues of colonialism and imperialism in contemporary cultural practices. Thus, Jehlen (1993) warns against the dual temptation of appropriating the voice of the dispossessed in order to speak on their behalf and simultaneously appropriating the omnipotent rhetoric of imperialist discourse itself in order to provide authoritative counter-narratives

(691). If the contingencies of the historical past are to be included in any analysis, then the underdetermination of historical evidence must be respected. The corollary of questioning the complete authority of the coloniser in the colonial encounter is, she concludes, that the interpretative authority of the contemporary scholar must also be acknowledged as having its own limits (692). It is incumbent upon us not to reproduce a version of the fantasy of an empire tied together by knowledge rather than by force, by overestimating the degree to which control over knowledge determined the course of colonial encounters (cf. Barnett, 1995b).

Slemon (1994) argues that colonial discourse theory has emerged around a set of unresolved disputes over two issues: the degree of historical specificity that discursive constructions of colonialism allow; and the question of how to theorise agency and resistance in discourse. It is this latter point in particular which will be the focus in what follows. Disputes over how far agency is possible when discursive formations construct subjects, and over how such agency is registered in the textual record, turn upon different conceptions of how to approach the task of reading historical texts and imply different models of intellectual political commitment.

Decentering Theory

It is routine to identify Edward Said's *Orientalism* as a founding moment in the emergence of the field of colonial discourse analysis. One might say that *Orientalism* marks the 'beginning' of colonial discourse theory, being a text which appears to include everything which develops out of it no matter how eccentric the development or inconsistent the result (Said, 1975:12). It is a genuinely seminal text, one whose significance might almost qualify its author for the accolade of being the founder of a new field of discursivity (cf. Foucault, 1986:114). In an attempt to capture the significance of this text, Hulme suggests that the formation of colonial discourse theory is best understood "as a process of *constellation* or *disposition* in which *Orientalism*, through repeated citation, has been given a role as common reference point for a body of work only thereby constituted as a body." (1989:2). This suggests that colonial discourse theory is formed as a field of contestation in which certain texts function as the formative ground of demonstration, debate, and disagreement. Through this textual network of citation, colonial discourse theory has been consolidated and made recognisable as such. The purpose of drawing attention to this process of consolidation by citation is not to dismiss the field as an artificial construct, as if there were some way of apprehending academic work free from such processes of formation. Foregrounding the processes of formation of the theoretical traditions with which one works better enables the identification of the limits and possibilities of such theory.

The centrality of *Orientalism* in the brief history of colonial discourse theory should be seen in relation to the formative role of post-structuralist ideas upon this field. Spivak's contention that "the critique of imperialism is deconstruction as such" (1988a:311) has been demonstrated by Young's (1990) genealogy of the emergence of French post-structuralism as a critique of Western forms of knowledge and their relations to actual processes of colonial domination. Critiques of the humanist subject, of historicism, of modes of interpretation and theories of meaning which privilege unity, intentionality, and the search for origins - all of these themes, routinely ascribed to post-structuralism, emerge from attempts to discern the ways in which European institutions of knowledge inscribe within their conceptual operations modes of reasoning and judgement which, at the very least, contain the possibility of being instrumentally appropriated in the service of colonial and imperial power. Colonial discourse analysis is formed from the interrogation of post-structuralist critical protocols "which has come from the manipulation and appropriation of ideas by textual communities outside the West, communities that found in its attack on traditional humanism and recognition of the plasticity of language powerful resonances with critiques already being developed in their own political and cultural contexts." (Seed, 1991:198). What this sort of appropriation has succeeded in doing is not so much realise the anti-colonial and anti-Eurocentric impulses of French post-structuralism, as much as supplement it by making evident and visible what was heretofore only implicit, and calling it to task in relation to these same imperatives. This, for example, is the argument of Spivak's account of the

work of the *Subaltern Studies* group, where she suggests that the political imperatives which lead them to subscribe to a notion of the subaltern as the subject of history reveals the ethnocentric limits of the axiomatic anti-humanism characteristic of certain strains of post-structuralism (Spivak, 1988b:208-9).

Neither *Orientalism* nor Said's work more generally can be simply characterised as post-structuralist. His work has always displayed a certain suspicion towards deconstruction and he has increasingly registered an impatience with the sorts of theoretical work with which post-structuralism is often associated. And the traces of Foucault which have been crucial to the reading of *Orientalism* must now be read in a different light, given Said's expressed reservations about Foucault's work (1986b, 1988). Thus Brennan (1994:333) remarks that "[a]part from an occasional admiring quotation from Burke, Nietzsche, or, yes, Foucault, there is precious little to substantiate Said's poststructuralism, and volumes to contest it."

It is, nonetheless, in the ambiguous traces of post-structuralism in *Orientalism* that the book's status as a node in a network of theoretical discussions is rooted. By proposing that representations were a crucial dimension to the exercise of worldly power, and by invoking Foucault's theoretical vocabulary to do so, Said established the grounds upon which the text was subsequently received and read. If Said showed that post-structuralism could be put to work in aid of a critique of Eurocentrism, then by so doing he inevitably invited scrutiny as to his particular use of that set of theoretical ideas. The constellatory process by which colonial discourse

emerges as a field of study has thus involved the habit of framing readings of *Orientalism* around hegemonic interpretations of post-structuralism. The most frequently repeated criticisms of *Orientalism*, such as Said's continued investment in humanist conceptions of subjectivity and mimetic conceptions of representation, turn upon the more or less implicit charge that he is not a 'good' post-structuralist. The weight that criticisms which alight upon Said's apparently inconsistent appropriation of post-structuralism carry is therefore dependent upon particular readings of post-structuralism, and especially the axiomatic status accorded to Foucault's 'anti-humanism'. *Orientalism* has come to act as the focal point of discussion precisely because it is a text in which the critique of colonial and imperial knowledge are brought into uneasy communication with post-structuralist theory. Its continued importance lies in the ways in which the distance between Said's specific appropriation and other readings of post-structuralism has been subsequently traversed. The foundational status routinely ascribed to *Orientalism* should therefore be seen as a retrospective gesture. Reference to *Orientalism* serves as a benchmark against which writers can differentiate themselves, display their own theoretical aplomb, while at the same time marking their affiliation with the projects with which Said's name has become associated.

Hulme (1989:3) argues that "the broad brush of Said's inquiry showed to good effect that the principle motifs and tropes of the European cultural tradition, far from being self-generated, were the product of constant, intricate, but mostly unacknowledged traffic with non-European world." Herein we find one of the central axioms of colonial discourse analysis, namely that neither

colonialism nor imperialism are merely marginal notes to Western history or culture, but constitutive of them. Said (1989b:217) argues that it is not possible to apprehend the world from a position inside Western societies without apprehending the context and legacies of imperialism. His literary criticism and his writings on the contemporary geopolitics of the Middle East have consistently challenged the denial of mutuality between different societies, the repression of shared and plural histories, and the presentation of colonialism and imperialism as processes in which all the value flowed from the imperious centre to the imperial margin.³ Colonial discourse theory is thus distinguished by endeavouring to further the process of 'decolonising the mind' by challenging the self-image of the West as a self-determining, self-contained entity which is the unique origin of a universalising history and culture, by attending to the processes by which the West was made from the 'outside in'.

Colonial discourse theory contributes to contemporary intellectual projects which take as their starting point the notion "not only that the history of colonialism is the history of the West but also that the history of colonialism is a counter-history to the normative, traditional history of the West." (Bhabha, 1990:218). This project of elaborating the counter-memories of established narratives of historical progress underwrites the sorts of claims made on behalf of colonial discourse analysis by Young (1990:11), for whom

³ Here, Said's work overlaps with that of writers working at some distance from the standard realms of contemporary cultural theory in which colonial discourse theory is framed. Ngugi's (1993) discussion of 'moving the centre' and Blaut's (1993) critique of diffusionism as 'the colonizer's model of the world' are examples of other projects which aim not just to reverse but to displace the binary structure of inside and outside that informs Eurocentric modes of thought.

“it is not merely an adjunct to more mainstream studies, a specialized activity only for minorities or for historians of imperialism and colonialism, but itself forms the point of questioning of Western knowledges, categories and assumptions.” Colonial discourse theory departs from previous critiques of Western colonialism by simultaneously undertaking a critique of forms of power *and* a critique of the dominant forms of knowledge and judgement in which that critique had previously been articulated. The critical charge of such work is directed not just at the hegemonic practices of colonial and imperial power, but also at the continued investment by existing traditions of left-critical thought in logics of Western historicism and exceptionalism. It thus belongs to that emergent ‘community of method’ (Said, 1990a:43-4) whose forms and imperatives emerge from changes in the institutional sites and constituencies addressed by oppositional scholarship and which distinguish it from a previous generation of anti-colonial intellectual work.

The unsettling effect such an emphasis can have upon even the most cherished traditions of left-critical thought are indicated by Viswanathan’s (1991) reading of the work of Raymond Williams, in which she finds a continued investment in the idea that British national culture was internally formed out of the tensions of class conflict, and only then transported overseas. In contrast, she argues that colonies such as India served as the ‘test sites’ for the construction of new institutions and discourses which were then repatriated back ‘home’. Such an account highlights the syncretic and hybrid qualities of cultural forms previously regarded as products of enclosed national spaces. That such critiques remain necessary is indicated by

MacKenzie's (1993) response to *Culture and Imperialism* (Said, 1993). He chastises Said for failing to understand that European imperialism and racism were first of all matters of national disputes amongst different Continental powers. In this move, imperialism and colonialism are re-centred upon the internal dynamics of European societies, and the engagement with non-European peoples and territories is relegated to the status of a secondary phenomena. And in so far as MacKenzie's critique of Said rests upon the suggestion that Said has overextended the practices of "lit.crit." and illegitimately overstepped the boundaries of disciplinary specialisation,⁴ his simultaneous invocation of proper disciplinary standards and re-centering of imperialism draw into focus what is most significant about colonial discourse theory's interventions in the contemporary academy - addressing colonialism and imperialism as discursive formations is at the same time to address the very foundations of contemporary disciplinarity.

⁴ See also Driver's (1996) comments on MacKenzie's rhetoric of disciplinary expertise.

Unhappy Orientalisms

Having just identified the decentering force of Said's intervention, we might consider the contradiction implied by Young's (1994a) observation that one of the strongest claims in *Orientalism* is that "the discursive construction of Orientalism was self-generating, and bore little if any relation to the actuality of its putative object, "the Orient"." This would appear to run counter to the claim by Hulme noted above. The disjunction arises from the unresolved problems inherent in Said's original formulation of Orientalist discourse as an 'imaginative geography' which produces the Orient as the projection of a Western will-to-mastery. The argument is that colonialism is discursively prefigured in the various representations through which the Orient as an imagined location is first constructed. As Said describes it, Orientalism has two dimensions. There is a store of ideas about the Orient which have been produced over centuries through which the Orient was staged for the West. In turn, from the late-eighteenth century onwards this reservoir of images and knowledges is drawn upon to direct the actual course of European territorial expansion and appropriation: "the structure of the Orientalist imagination is directly projected onto a colonial administration which in turn is converted directly into a system of roles, exclusions, and prohibitions placed upon Orientals in the Orient: the three feed each other in a self-confirming process." (Said, 1976:47). I want to call into question the theoretical adequacy

of this model of colonial discourse understood in terms of projection and prefiguration.⁵

How exactly does Said's notion of 'imaginative geography' (1978a:49-73) present the process by which *culture takes place*? The first trope one finds is the psychologistic one of the West projecting its anxieties and paranoias onto another spatial realm, through which the 'Orient' is constituted as the fully-formed mirror image of Western self. This understanding proposes that the essentials of colonial knowledge are formed prior to and in the absence of the actual event of colonial contact. Invoking Bachelard to describe how distant places are invested with significance from afar by the 'poetic' ascription of meaning, Orientalism is presented as producing meaning from a 'here' about a 'there' in advance of actually going 'there' (54-5). Said's early formulations of geographical themes are connected to the animating *epistemological* question in *Orientalism*: how do representations relate to the reality that pre-exists them outside of the realm of representations? In his eagerness to stress that Orientalism involves a misrepresentation of complex realities, Said is forced to posit a core of Orientalist knowledge which escapes

⁵ Said's particular emphasis on the projection of imaginary geographical entities needs to be read in light of his political writings on the politics of the Middle East. If projection is a means of securing colonial hegemony, then an integral dimension of decolonisation is the seizure of the 'means of projection' (Miller, 1990:296). The production of narratives which project the return to a future homeland yet to exist has been a basic feature of Palestinian resistance. Said has remarked that rarely has so much "of a people's political identity depended on the collective act of counting, rendering, and projecting themselves - beyond the armies, the states, the lamentable stabilities of the present." (1983:9). In a geopolitical situation in which the affirmation of a Palestinian identity and homeland has often been intolerable, he has argued that "the 'idea' of a Palestinian homeland would have to be enabled by the prior acceptance of a narrative entailing a homeland." (1984:14). His most recent commentaries on the 'peace process' in the Middle East continue to emphasise the importance of the narrative projection of alternative visions of the past and especially of the future (Said, 1995). My concern is with the degree to which this politically situated emphasis on projection as an irreducible dimension of counter-discourse can serve as the basis for a *general* theoretical model of the operations of colonial discourse in all situations.

the principle of inescapable entanglement of peoples and places. The Orient emerges as the fantasy projection of an autonomous will-to-power: as the effect of the anxieties suffered essentially in isolation by a meta-subject, the West.

Young (1990) identifies a central tension in Said's account which bears upon our concerns here. On the one hand, Said holds that the 'Orient' is essentially a misrepresentation, which reflects projections of fear and anxiety but which bears little relation to the actualities of complex societies it purports to name and describe. Yet, on the other hand there is the suggestion that such misrepresentations become effective instruments of colonial power and administration. As Young observes, the implication of the second emphasis is that "at a certain moment Orientalism as representation did have to encounter the 'actual' conditions of what was actually there, and that it showed itself effective at a material level as a form of power and control." (129). Said does not adequately theorise the means by which knowledge about other cultures becomes effective as an instrument in the exercise of power over those cultures. His only gesture in this direction is the distinction between 'latent' and 'manifest' Orientalism (Said, 1978a:201-25), the latter presented as the means by which a static and synchronic essentialism is narrated into practical historical situations, reinforcing the psychologistic impulse of his early account. In such a formulation of colonial discourses as imaginative projections, Europeans always find what they expected in the Orient, and the actualities of colonial contact and administration do not fundamentally

interrupt the structures of understanding that frame any encounter with the 'real' Orient⁶.

There is, however, a second tropological schema at work in Said's original account. This presents Orientalism as a discourse which stages its own performance (71-2). This theme is constructed very specifically to stress that Orientalism's representations were produced for a European audience. It underscores the sense that actual colonialism is prefigured at the level of culture, in such a way that the actual encounter with the 'real' Orient appears

⁶ This lacuna in *Orientalism* needs to be contrasted with the discussions found in Said's writing on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. This conflict has always essentially been about the issue of sovereignty over land, but Said has identified a marked contrast in the 'geopolitical imaginations' of the two sides in this conflict. His account of the formation of Zionism (1980:56-114) repeats the theme of the discursive prefiguration of actual territorial appropriation, but also emphasises that this was closely tied to mechanisms for transferring general principles into reality. Zionism, in Said's account, is characterised by both projective visualisation of schemes and plans *and* the development of institutions to implement these and for creating a network of realities (86). Thus, while this account echoes the themes of imaginative geography in *Orientalism*, with its suggestion that Zionism was an outgrowth of nineteenth century imperialism and shared its epistemology of projecting designs and desires on various territories, it also emphasises that the ultimate success of the Zionist movement lay in its combination of this projective political epistemology with an attention to practical implementation. For the Zionist movement, Said argues, the 'Promised Land' was not just an abstract entity but "a specific territory with specific characteristics, that was surveyed down to the last millimeter, settled on, planned for, built on, and so forth, in detail." (95). This reading informs Said's consistent and continuing criticism of the ideological failures of the Palestinian liberation movement. In contrast to Zionism, which was not just a general colonial vision but "essentially a Benthamite policy of detail" (1986a:101), he argues that the Palestinian liberation movement has focused only on general principles and has neglected to develop its own counter-discipline of detail. This failure continues to be a central theme in Said's contemporary criticisms of the Palestinian leadership's role in the current 'peace process' (e.g. Said, 1995:24-30). On Said's account, the failure is in fact twofold: on the one hand "the concrete human detail of Palestinian existence was regularly subordinated to big general ideas", while he also argues that the Palestinian liberation movement has also consistently failed to address itself to the wide sphere of civil society in North America and Europe (Said 1994a:33-42, 56-68; 1995:91-98). Thus, while Zionism combined a policy of detail with the dramatic projection of its cause on the stage of Western public opinion, Said has persistently argued that the Palestinians have failed to match this effort in both dimensions. It should of course be noted that this 'failure' is in part an effect of the discursive hegemony by which the accumulation of land and legitimacy by the Israeli state has simultaneously involved the displacement of other peoples and of other claims to legitimacy (Said, 1980:57), so that affirmation of the Palestinian cause has more often than not been rendered unspeakable. Said's accounts of Zionism as a policy of detail suggests a more nuanced account of the relation between discourses of geographical possession and actual practices of appropriation, settlement, and displacement than the one generally derived from a reading based solely on his 'academic' writing on this issue.

as a carefully directed and minutely orchestrated *mis-en-scene*, involving a pre-established script faithfully followed by each and every actor. Such an understanding still requires that the texts of such a discursive formation be read as the expressions of a paranoid group psychology produced wholly in a metropolitan context and having no purchase on any 'real' Orient at all.

The theatrical metaphor thus remains subordinated to the Bachelardian emphasis on projection by poesis. However, if we unravel this theme from this particular web, perhaps we can free it from the overriding emphases on the imaginative prefiguration of actual events. Rather than thinking of colonial practices as more or less perfect performances of already highly rehearsed scripts, we might instead read the colonial archive as made up of the traces of extensive exercises in improvised ad-libbing. If the discursive production of colonial space is to be fruitfully understood on analogy with a dramatic production, then we should not think of the scenes so produced as realisations of a single autonomous *ur-script* which is the model for each of its own performances. If these performances have a script, then it is one whose existence resides nowhere other than in the contingencies of its repeated (re)enactments. Such a metaphorical flight might lead us towards new ways of reading the textual artefacts of the imperial archive which do not rely on the positing of a single coherent will animating each utterance, and which are able to foreground colonial discourses as the products of the contingencies and contestations of the ongoing reproduction of colonial and imperial relations.

Said's original formulations have of course been subjected to various criticisms and revisions which have established that Orientalism was not quite

the singular, unified system of representation he originally suggested (e.g. Kabbani, 1986; Lowe, 1991; MacKenzie, 1995). This stress upon the plurality of representations is no doubt important, but does not in itself upset the basic architecture of the projection-model of colonial representation. Miller's (1985) discussion of 'Africanist discourse' is perhaps more fruitful. In addressing representations of Africa he disrupts the understanding of how European representations of otherness actually work. While Said's account presents the 'Orient' as a fully constituted negative image of the European self, Miller suggests that by contrast "Africanist discourse is at best an *unhappy* Orientalism, a discourse of desire unfulfilled and unfulfillable." (23). *If* the Orient is the product of a will-to-power which succeeds in satisfying its own desires, then Africanist writing consistently presents Africa as a 'nullity', thus marking Africa as the privileged location for the *failure* of understanding and knowledge and the suspension of the satisfactions with which they are normally associated: "Africanist writing projects out from itself an object that refuses to conform to the demands placed upon it." (16). Africanist discourse is characterised by the twin failure to write Europe's desire upon Africa or to hear any message that might be uttered by Africans. Entities such as 'Africa' as they appear in colonial discourses cannot be understood as the product of a straightforward projection of desire, for what is marked in such discourses are the traces of the interruption and disappointments suffered by any such desire. Miller presents this as a specific feature of representations of Africa in European discourses, and while I do not want to challenge this specificity, I do want to suggest that his emphasis upon the disjunctures and breaches of

Africanist discourse might be taken as the principle of a revised notion of the work of representation in colonial discourse more generally.

Much is at stake in this proposed move beyond a projection model of colonial discourse. Viswanthan's study (1989) of English literary studies in India has done much to displace models of thinking of Western culture as the ready-formed product of a metropolitan context which was then transferred overseas. While she de-centres the construction of English literary study away from the metropolitan centre, she does not fully displace it into the 'contact zone' of the colonial encounter. That she continues to read her archive on the model of projection is evident when she argues that to study the ideology of literary education outside of its reception is not to erase the voice of the colonised, since, as she continues:

“it is not generally realised how infinitely more binding the tyranny of representation can be on the coloniser than it is on the colonized, for if the colonial subject is a construct emanating from the colonizer's head, and therefore removed from history, the history to which the British administrator responds, the impending “event” to which his measures are so crucially attached is real only to the extent that it provides the rationale for his actions. How the native actually responds is so removed from the colonizer's representational system, his understanding of the meaning of events, that it enters into the realm of another history of which the latter has no comprehension or awareness.” (12).

While this conception includes the welcome position that colonial discourses should be read as being effective upon the colonisers as well the colonised (cf. Trotter, 1990), it nonetheless implies an understanding of the production of knowledge which is strictly removed from any 'event' of contact between coloniser and colonised. According to this model, representations of colonised subjects are produced and come to be effective upon colonising subjects in an entirely circular process, and at no time does confrontation with the 'real' interrupt this circle.

Viswanthan's concern in this passage is to safeguard the conception of the colonised as possessing another knowledge and history, in accord with Parry's (1987) criticism that the absence of this acknowledgement is a weakness in extant conceptions of colonial discourse. If colonialist knowledge is understood to have been projected onto a subject which is passive in relation to its production, then resistance is only imaginable within this projection scenario by positing a pristine space wholly outside of and untouched by the event of colonial contact and confrontation. Gregory (1994:178) captures the dilemma that such a conception gives rise to when he suggests that the difficulty in finding a space for non-European agency can only be solved if the notion that colonial knowledge was solely the product of the West is abandoned: "colonial knowledge was not always and everywhere a purely European construct. The entanglements were by no means equal, but subjugated peoples often possessed a startling capacity for challenging and changing European inscriptions. If this is suppressed, then one conjures the ghostly presence of an "essential" Other behind the skein of colonial meanings

that supposedly shrouds it.” The problem which haunts conceptions of colonial discourse, whereby it is only possible to affirm resistance by effacing the event of contact and the relationality of colonial situations, might be avoided if the projection model is displaced from its privileged position within conceptions of colonial discourse. Only then might the contribution of other knowledges and traditions be recovered from the texts of the imperial archives, by reading them not as manifestations of a singular teleological desire but as syncretic amalgams of information and meanings drawn from various sources in the course of the colonial encounter.

In the case of discourses which were intended to provide practically useful knowledge of peoples and places, the notion of representation as projection is certainly inadequate. Robbins (1992:213) suggests that consideration of travel and exploration genres rather than literary writing leads to the conclusion that “[i]f imperialism required not just a rationale (the inferiority of the natives), but working knowledge of a certain objectivity that would aid in conquering and ruling, then projection probably is not the whole story”, and he also makes the same point more generally:

“The imperial powers could not have successfully conquered and occupied so much of the world if the West had done nothing but project its suppressed contradictions and anxieties onto resisting Eastern subjects. Some degree of non-projective information about the East must be assumed to intervene, not thanks to the West’s objectivity but simply because it needed

useful knowledge in order to rule with relatively efficient brutality.” (1993:202).

As O’Hanlon and Washbrook (1991:115), observe, the notion that colonial discourses were entirely the construct of the coloniser overlooks the participation of both colonised elites and subaltern groups, and thus threatens to ignore important insights into how such discourses proved effective on some sections of colonised societies. It follows that we require an approach to the analysis of colonial discourse which is able to locate in the production of knowledge certain types of communication taking place across the coloniser-colonised divide, without at the same time losing sight of this communication being structured by highly unequal social relations.

This is at present one of the issues under dispute in work on colonial discourse. Thomas (1994:3) suggests that colonial discourse has too often been theorised as wholly the product of the colonising power, and that consequently “it has figured above all as a coherent imposition, rather than a practically mediated relation”, and Chrisman (1990:41) identifies a need to move away from essentialist and characterisations of the coloniser/colonised dyad in order to attend to “mediations, contradictions, the dynamics of relationality.” Recent interest in stressing the dialogic qualities of colonial relations has, however, met with stiff criticism from Parry (1993a), who considers this tendency as an abandonment of a recognition of the antagonistic nature of colonial power relations in favour of notions of pure difference. While not commending those conceptualisations where dialogism seems to be considered a form of friendly conversation characterised by some sort of “non-

specific ethical bonhomie” (Fabian, 1990:763), I consider the emphasis on imbrication and dialogue to be essential for the full appreciation of the production of knowledge under colonial and imperial relations.⁷

What needs to be underscored at this juncture is that a non-projective model of colonial discourse requires us to question the adequacy of any conception which locates the site of enunciation of such discourses wholly on the side of the colonisers. As Williams and Chrisman (1993:16) suggest, the problem with debates on ‘native agency’ is the tendency to present the colonialist and imperialist subject as having discursive primacy, and the ‘native’ or ‘subaltern’ is consequently considered a secondary subject-effect accorded greater or lesser degrees of oppositional agency depending on the whim of the critic. They suggest that what is required is a conception that starts by acknowledging that colonised groups might “have played a constitutive rather than a reflective role in colonial and domestic imperial discourse and subjectivity. Rather than being that other onto which the coloniser projects a previously constituted subjectivity and knowledge, native presences, locations, and political resistance need to be further theorised as having a determining or primary role in colonial discourses, and in the attendant domestic versions of these discourses.” This injunction implies a shift away from a strong emphasis on irredeemable manichean conflict towards concepts which focus upon dialogue and contact in order to recognise the colonial encounter as one which is productive of *new* meanings (cf. Bhabha, 1994:212-35). The site of enunciation of non-projective discourses

⁷ Young (1995:1-29) provides a critique of the favoured figure of ‘hybridity’ through which this emphasis has often been articulated in recent cultural theory.

must be reconceptualised as lying within the interstitial zone of colonial contact, a reconceptualisation which is required above all in order to identify the constitutive role of non-Western agency and knowledge in the production of such discourses. An affirmation of “the imbrication of our various pasts and presents, the ineluctable relationships of shared and contested meanings, values, and material resources” (Mohanty, 1989:66) should not be read as a way of reproducing an empty humanistic universalism, but rather as a commitment to rewriting the historical record in such a way so as to register “the experiences of dominations and being dominated together.” (Said, 1990b:50). And if we are to foreground the irreducible entanglements of the coloniser and colonised, then we are drawn towards a consideration of the issue through which they are bound together: the contested inscription of colonial space.

Writing Spaces

If colonial discourses operate to produce representations of racial and cultural Others, then it also follows that “the Western self is itself produced as an effect of the Western discursive production of its Others.” (Frankenburg, 1994:17). This conception of the dialectical constitution of colonial subjectivities through representations of relations between a Western self and non-Western other needs to be interrupted by introducing a third term into the equation: space. Colonial discourse might be best understood in terms of what Hulme (1986:159) calls the “colonial triangle” - as a set of representations of relations between the European, the ‘native’, and land. This is a crucial dimension of any treatment of colonial discourses as the site of subject-formation, for we are led to suppose that, in so far as both colonialism and imperialism are systems of domination which involve the control and appropriation of land and territory, then representations of the relations between colonised and colonisers will be mediated by representations of the relations between each of these and the spaces through which they are tied together.⁸ Considering the essentially contested status of land in colonial discourses requires us to think of space as both the stake over which the power relations inscribed in colonial discourses are arranged, and the slate upon which those discourses are themselves inscribed.

Only by considering questions of geography will it be possible to succeed in the task of recovering the entanglements of different societies and cultures which is a prerequisite of contemporary critical theory. This is made

⁸ See Gregory, 1994:150-181, for a consideration of existing conceptualisations of the spatiality of colonial discourses; cf. Sparke, 1994.

evident by Said's use of a heightened geographical rhetoric in which to express this imperative. The figure of contrapuntalism, although most obviously read as a musical one, underscores the sense of different processes with different temporalities taking place simultaneously and tied together by virtue of being performed across the same space. The singular narratives of historicist reasoning need to be displaced by modes of interpretation and representation "able to think through and interpret together discrepant experiences, each with its particular agendas and pace of development, its own formations, its internal coherence and its system of external relationships." (1986c:56). Said's call for a 'global contrapuntal analysis' (1992) of cultural practices requires a commitment to situate different works in relation to each other in the world. 'Contrapuntalism' thus complements his favoured theme of 'worldliness', similarly understood as an attitude directed towards the restoration of cultural works to their proper place in their fullest global context (1991:28-9). And contrapuntalism should not, he insists (1992:16), give rise to an image of a global culture made up of symphonic harmonies, but is "more to do with atonal ensembles, and with such spatial or geographical and rhetorical practices as inflections, limits, constraints, intrusions, inclusions, prohibitions, all of them tending toward elucidations of a complex and uneven topography." A contrapuntal global analysis should be a means of expanding and transforming both how and what to read in quite basically geographical senses, by requiring that particular works be read in reference to others of the same moment and by reference to the geographies which they themselves inscribe within them.

Said's account of *Mansfield Park* (1989a) has become the model for an interpretative practice which addresses the ways in which any given piece of discourse articulates or dissimulates in the same written space 'interdependent territories' and 'overlapping domains' (1990b:50). This reading is premised upon the need to establish the connections between what was written about metropolitan societies and representations of what exists beyond them. As Said observes, what is needed is a counterpoint between these two forms of representation, a principle of rearticulating what appears to be separate, and he insists that "[t]he inherent mode of this counterpoint [...] is not temporal, but spatial." (1989a:151). Said's concern with the spatiality of cultural works is not therefore tantamount to a simple call to understand their significance as being embedded in particular circumscribed spaces of knowledge. Rather, as Brennan (1992:89) describes it, this turn to a geographical rhetoric to describe a new mode of interpretation implies an "emphasis on lateral movement, on the simultaneity of life in the separate but coeval cultures of a world that exists in the present."

It would be fundamentally mistaken to dismiss the heightened emphasis on a geographical vocabulary in Said's recent work as a sign of a 'geographical ambivalence', according to which his concerns with the inscription of 'imaginary geographies' remain detached from the 'very material historical geographies' of colonialism and imperialism (Smith, 1994:494-5). Such charges misconstrue the crucial emphasis found in Said's recent work by reattaching it to a binary division between representation and reality which is no longer adequate to it. Said's (1990a) reading of Camus is

not about finding 'imaginary geographies' in texts which might or might not 'crystallize out' into the historical geographies of the Algerian war. It is, rather, about a text whose worldly force lies in its ability to "treat reality appropriatively." (1980:73). Said reads *L'Etranger* as a text which asserts a claim over geography itself, situating it as a work which is addressed to a particular audience and which strongly affirms that French-Algerian identity is indissolubly tied to the Algerian landscape. This text does a particular sort of cultural work by asserting control over space itself in its affirmation of the relation between identity and geography, and its political significance lies not in the content of any imaginary geography it might project but in the structure of address through which this relation is secured. Said's reading is one which places this text firmly within the field of political struggle of its time by reading it as an intervention in a conflict in which rightful claims to legitimate hold over land was the central issue.

Said's deployment of a spatialised vocabulary is, then, divided between his metaphorical use of themes such as exile or homelessness to represent certain models of intellectual vocation (e.g. Said, 1994b:35-47; cf. Robbins, 1983; JanMohamed, 1992), and an increasingly direct and referential use of geographical tropes. As Brennan (1992:89) observes, in Said's work on culture and imperialism the trope of geography refers quite simply and directly to processes of territorial accumulation, so that "[s]pace here is, quite simply, land." In this usage, Brennan rightly observes that space is kept from playing a metaphorical role and has, rather, taken on a certain 'hardness' as a way of explicitly referring to imperial processes of territorial plunder and

appropriation: “At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others.” (Said, 1993:5).

The corollary of keeping the question of space in view whenever considering representations of the coloniser/colonised dyad is the foregrounding of the question of writing. Young (1994a) has argued that the notion of capitalism as a ‘territorial writing machine’ might inform understandings of colonialism, since it “describes rather exactly the *process* of colonisation by which the territory and cultural space of an indigenous society must be disrupted, dissolved and then recoded according to the needs of the apparatus of the occupying power.” (22). The concepts of de-territorialization and re-territorialization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983) serve to foreground the destruction and refiguring of cultures and the reorganisation of knowledges into new frameworks. This implies a conceptualisation which captures both the material operations and ideological dimensions of colonial apparatuses of territorial appropriation by understanding “colonialism as a form of writing geography” (ibid.). Understanding colonialism through the concept of territorialization “foregrounds the fact that cultural colonisation was not simply a discursive operation but a seizure of cultural space.” (24). The appropriation of enunciative space was intimately tied to the appropriation of physical space.

Young concludes that it is necessary to develop a conception of colonialism as a set of geography-writing practices which can understand such processes in terms of “palimpsestual inscription and reinscription, a historical

model which will acknowledge the extent to which cultures were not simply destroyed but rather layered on top of each other, giving rise to struggles that themselves only increased the imbrication of each with the other and their translation into increasingly uncertain patchwork identities.” (26-7). This suggests that an affirmation of the ineluctable entwinement of societies and cultures requires us not only to foreground the internal and external geographical dimensions of cultural discourses, but also necessitates a reconsideration of conceptualisations of writing. In particular, it is necessary to displace the notion that the written texts of the colonial archive are enunciated solely by one side of the colonial encounter, and rather understand writing as the very space in which difference is negotiated and articulated.

In raising this theme of writing, we need to immediately acknowledge its centrality to Western discourses about non-Western societies. As Gates (1987) argues, there has been a persistent understanding that the absence of writing is an indication of the failure of a society to develop the means by which to represent itself to itself, understood as the very condition of historicity itself. This leads him to suggest that “[c]ontrary to our assumptions that the Western philosophical tradition privileged the spoken over the written text, close readings of the evidence suggest strongly that the written word was privileged, not only above the spoken word but among all of the other representational arts as well.” (47). While Gates’s remarks appear aimed at calling to task a certain Derridean orthodoxy about Western ‘logocentrism’, it is not the case that the privilege accorded to empirical writing in the Western tradition contradicts Derrida’s (1976) claims about that tradition’s essentially

ethnocentric prioritisation of the voice as the sign of identity, presence, and unity. For as Gates himself argues, the absence of writing is problematic for writers such as Hume and Locke or Kant and Hegel precisely because they conceive of writing as the empirical container in which the workings of the mind are stored and from which they can be recovered intact. The privilege accorded to writing rests upon understandings of textuality which work to denigrate empirically oral cultures in the name of values which are consistently figured in terms of 'voice' and 'speech'. Miller (1990:248) thus notes the paradox whereby the conceptual privileging of the voice as the vehicle of consciousness is one which takes place within the medium of writing, so that, as he puts it, in the course of colonialism the West "imposed literacy while dreaming of orality."

In disputes over the theorisation of colonial discourse, the constellation of meanings that accrue to 'speech', 'voice', and 'silence' is a central issue. What needs to be underscored is that what is at issue in these disputes is the *textual deployment* of particular tropes. The conceptualisation of the relations between writing and speech is thus central not only to the workings of colonial ideologies but also to the work of critically analysing the written archives of colonialism and imperialism. For, as de Certeau (1988:209-43) shows, the same set of assumptions about writing as the very motor of historicity which one can find in Hegel, for example, also found modern historiography, which emerges around a set of related concepts: writing, temporality, identity, and consciousness. A specifically Western ethnocentric conception of writing remains the invisible condition of the modern historiographical enterprise,

according to which writing is constructed as an archive which can be subjected to various operations of recovery of the past as a past-presence. And such conceptions of writing, history, and historiography in turn secrete a set of assumptions about orality as incapable of serving as the basis of historicity. De Certeau's discussion should lead us to be suspicious of any interpretative account of colonial discourse analysis that uncritically recommends the recovery of the past as an absent presence through the work of reading a written archive, for such a project may unwittingly reproduce the very values through which colonial discourses operated.

We can find in Todorov's (1984) account of the conquest of the New World a repetition of the ethnocentric evaluation of the relations between writing and history. He argues that the Incas, Aztecs, and Mayas occupied different points on an evolutionary scale of the development of writing (79-84), and that the pattern of the conquest followed this uneven development of writing. His account invests its authority unquestioningly in a notion of "writing as an index of the evolution of mental states" (81), and in so doing manages to dissimulate the social relations of conquest behind a strictly ahistorical and technologicistic account of the uses of writing. For Todorov, the absence of writing is the crucial determinant of the outcome of the encounter between the Europeans and American societies, because it meant a lack of manipulative power in the present, by stifling individualism and innovation and determining the predominance of a cyclical rather than linear conception of time which rendered indigenous societies unable to effectively respond to the new situation.

As Greenblatt (1991:11-12) observes, Todorov's account rests on the claim that writing is a superior representational instrument than speech. He argues that Todorov's privileging of written language and its allocation to only one side of the forces involved in the colonial encounter effaces the relationality of that encounter. The suggestion that it was writing, which the Europeans already possessed prior to the encounter, which provided them with an autonomous and superior representational and cognitive grasp over their new situation implies that they were able to master that situation outside of any dependence at all on indigenous peoples and their knowledge. In contrast, Greenblatt sets out to show that what was crucial to the Spanish conquest with respect to language and representation was *translation*: "Translation and communication were crucial, but the ability to communicate effectively is a quite different matter from the ability through writing or any other means to perceive or represent reality." (12). Thus, in redirecting our attention to translation as the crucial practice in the event of colonial contact, Greenblatt also directs our attention back towards speech. However, if it is speech as the medium of translation which is at issue, then speech is on its way to being reconfigured not as the space of self-present identity and full consciousness, but as a space always already inhabited by 'writing' as the figure of *différance*. To argue as does Todorov that writing was the crucial determinant because it provided the ability to represent reality more accurately is to repeat the justifications of colonialism and imperialism, and it is also to misplace the particular significance of writing. In contrast to this, our practical task becomes one of examining how events of cross-cultural communication are

retrospectively reinscribed in accounts of the colonial encounter into a conceptual framework in which speech and writing are accorded starkly differing values.

This impulse to retheorise the constitutive event of contact in colonial discourses is a feature of recent work (Bitterli, 1989:20-51; Pratt, 1992; Suleri, 1992a). Young (1994b) argues that the understanding of colonial discourse established by the work of the ‘holy trinity’ of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha, has reached an impasse whereby theoretical advance has ceased and simply been overtaken by examining new archives. He suggests that this might be due to the emphasis in this canonical colonial discourse theory on the ‘fantasmatics’ of colonial discourse to the detriment of attending to the actual operations of colonial discourses in concrete situations (151). Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena* (1987) is presented as an alternative model of colonial discourse (Young, 1994b:155-6). As Young notes, Bernal concentrates “on the symptomatic moment in anthropology in which indigenous and Western academic knowledges confront each other.” (156). The significance of this attention to the contact or confrontation of different knowledge-formations is that it promises a path beyond the projection model of colonial discourse as imaginative geography, which all too often continues to construe the “so-called native as an object but not as source of knowledge.” (156). This is the continuing problem identified more generally by Slater, of an ethnocentric universalism based on a mode of reasoning in which “the South is not constituted as a space of knowledge, let alone theoretical knowledge.” (1994:100). This, then, would seem to be the moment to turn to a

consideration of the predominant stage upon which questions of agency have been theorised in colonial discourse analysis, and ask what sort of actor is the 'subaltern'?

Caliban's Women

Miller (1990:248) observes that "the voice remains our central metaphor for political agency and power", and Rose (1986:13) similarly remarks that in most versions of oppositional left politics "political truth relies [...] on the concept of full speech." Precisely for this reason, any project committed to questioning the unexamined assumptions that underwrite the consistent equation of subjectivity with speech/voice, where 'speech and 'voice' are understood as the means of expression of a self-identical consciousness able to unequivocally apprehend reality, is likely to be met with a certain amount of suspicion (12-15).

The problem of the inscription of resistance and the possibilities of recovering traces of agency from the archive of colonial and imperial texts is formative of the field of colonial discourse analysis. Terdiman (1985:36) argues that any given example of discourse presupposes "a horizon of competing, contrary utterances against which it asserts its own energies." It is with the elaboration of these 'counter-discourses' which theories of agency in colonial discourse analysis are concerned. This effort might be best described, following Jameson (1981), as an attempt at the 'redialogisation' of colonial discourses. His notion that hegemonic cultural works tend to perpetuate only a limited range of the voices from the historical dramas which produced them,

and that the critical task is therefore to re-write them into their relational place within a polemical and contested dialogical field, rather neatly captures the outlines of the project of analysing colonial discourses in order to recover traces of subaltern agency and resistance. The recovery of ‘mute inscriptions’ from dominant discourses requires “the restoration or artificial reconstruction of the voice to which they were initially opposed, a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered to the winds, or reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture.” (85). Although originally framed in relation to class relations only, this strategy for reading cultural works is consistent with the aims which frame discussions of subalternity, calling attention to the erasure or re-encoding of subordinated meanings by dominant discursive systems. There is, however, a certain ambivalence about Jameson’s formulation of “the restoration or artificial reconstruction” of these voices, and Berubé (1992:223) suggests that this ‘cageyness’ enables him to dodge the central question of “how do we know which one we’re doing?”. I suggest that we might usefully consider disputes over the conceptualisation of ‘native’ or ‘subaltern’ agency in colonial discourse theory to turn upon this very same theoretico-methodological ambivalence between the restoration of voices *or* the transformative re-writing and reconstruction of them.

The term ‘subaltern’ comes originally from Gramsci. His discussion of ‘subaltern classes’ is framed in specifically historiographical terms: an integral part of counter-hegemonic intellectual practice lies in retrieving from the apparently spontaneous actions of subaltern classes the signs of independent

initiative (1971:52-55). The subalternity of these groups, the apparent lack of a teleology towards universality in their actions, is presented as being itself a written effect. The problem is that those elements of active class-consciousness and leadership that such groups may have exercised in the past “cannot be checked, have left no reliable document” (196). Still tied closely to their particular interests and the influence of dominant groups it “consequently never occurs to them that their history might have some possible importance, that there might be some value in leaving documentary evidence of it.” (ibid.). The subalternity of such groups is simultaneously manifested and confirmed by a textual absence, by the fact that they did not articulate themselves in writing. The emergent, pre-hegemonic status of the subaltern is constructed by Gramsci as a quality that can only be identified with hindsight (Lowe, 1991:18-19). If the full significance of the practices of subaltern groups can only be revealed after the fact, then the work of historical interpretation easily becomes constituted as a continuation and fulfilment of those historical struggles. The conceptual field opened around the term ‘subaltern’ thus contains within it from the start a space for the installation of the work of historical interpretation as an essential moment of any oppositional political practice.

While Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s discussions of subalternity stand in relation to a wider field of discussions in Indian historiography, the widespread circulation of ‘subaltern’ as a theoretical category in the Western academy is derived from readings of her specific deployment of the term. Spivak’s concern is to highlight the potential pitfalls and complicities of

conceptualisations which continue to define resistance in terms of unified, self-identical consciousness. Sharpe (1989:137) notes that colonial discourses work to secure the *narrative containment* of resistance to colonialism, and accordingly Spivak calls to account the fact that any 'voice' that is heard in colonialist texts has already been appropriated and re-articulated by the dominant discourse, and that it is uttered by subjects admitted into those formations under particular circumstances: "No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always historically refracted what might have been absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self." (Spivak, 1985:253). Das (1989:315) outlines the basic premise upon which such an understanding rests: "Once we acknowledge that traces of rebellion are embodied in the form of a record produced in the context of the exercise of bureaucratic and legal domination, we also have to accept that the speech of the subaltern, when it becomes available for study, has already been appropriated by these superior forces of authority." Disputes about representations of subaltern agency turn on the question of how far the written-ness of the colonial archive complicates attempts to simply recover from that archive the silenced voices of subaltern consciousness. Spivak's position is that, since it is textuality which is at issue, the central question is one of *reading* rather than listening for voices. Although these disputes do not neatly distil into two camps, I shall stage my discussions of them by taking Benita Parry and Spivak as figures for two broadly identifiable positions on how to approach subaltern agency. It is these two positions which form the impasse, identified by Gates (1991:462), which

discussions of agency in cultural theory premised upon what he calls the 'colonialist paradigm' have reached: "You can empower discursively the native, and open yourself to charges of downplaying the epistemic (and literal) violence of colonialism; or play up the absolute nature of colonial domination, and be open to charges of negating the subjectivity and agency of the colonised, thus textually replicating the repressive operations of colonialism."

Parry (1987) takes issue with Spivak for what she regards as a failure to recognise the full extent and existence of anti-colonial resistance to colonial discursive apparatuses. She identifies in Spivak's account of subalternity a "deliberated deafness to the native voice where it is to be heard" (39), and as implying that the master discourses of imperialism and colonialism pre-empt all forms of resistance. On this reading, Spivak's apparent refusal to countenance the existence of subaltern agency is an act of professional self-aggrandisement, a charge repeated by Loomba (1993:217), who suggests that "the silence of Spivak's subaltern is a pre-condition for her own project of representation." (cf. Loomba, 1992:183-9). Parry's reading has taken on a certain authority in defining what subalternity is all about, and not least in sanctioning the strong misreading of Spivak's theorisation as amounting to a denial of the possibility of resistance or oppositional agency *per se*. The strictly rhetorical question 'Can the subaltern speak?' thus gets drawn into a network of overlapping debates in which the overriding concern guiding theoretical exegeses and textual interpretation is to establish that, whatever Spivak might say, the subaltern certainly *can* speak after all.

While Spivak suggests that the project of restoring the colonised as subjects of their own histories shares in the nativist reversal of modes of binary representations of difference, Parry (1994) argues that the models of resistance which underwrite recuperative strategies are more complex and nuanced than a simple restoration of mythical essence and identity. Hall (1990:225) reminds us that “[w]e should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails.” Spivak’s work is not dismissive of this effort, but she is concerned with moving beyond such strategies to new models of representation and identity. As she notes, post-colonial nationalist discourse is formed by the reversal and appropriation of a set of terms, categories and problematics derived from the old colony: national identity, democracy, citizenship, socialism and capitalist development (1993b:78-9). The issue of subalternity arises out of the acknowledgement that “there is a space in the new nation that cannot share in this reversal. This space had no established agency of traffic with the culture of imperialism.” (79). In the discourse of the *Subaltern Studies* writers, subalternity resides in that space which was never fully integrated into the narrative of nationalist decolonisation which frames the politics of the post-colonial state (Guha, 1982; Chatterjee, 1986). ‘Subaltern’ names those groups with no or limited access to the discourses and institutions through which the culture of imperialism was mobilised to produce a colonial elite, out of which the dominant forms of anti-colonial and post-colonial political discourse emerge, and through which contemporary postcolonial intellectual debates are made

possible (Spivak, 1991:172-3). Subalternity is defined as such by being located in a space of difference outside of these hegemonic networks (1993b:77-78).

Spivak (1992c:44-5) makes the point most bluntly by observing that what goes most unnoticed in readings of 'Can the subaltern speak?' is the account of the suicide with which this essay concludes (1988a:294-308). What this episode illustrates is that there exists a field of agency which is not allowed to communicate with the dominant culture of imperialism. The woman whose story is reconstructed had tried to communicate, and do so through the most non-masculine of networks, but had nonetheless failed. It is this that leads Spivak to declare that 'the subaltern cannot speak': "When you say cannot speak, it means that if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern's sphere." (1992c:46). What Spivak foregrounds is that a cultural sphere represented as a space of speaking subjects is one which necessarily requires the conditions for dialogue, call and response, and that the establishment of such a sphere as part of the process of cultural domination under imperialism rested on the exclusion of some groups.

This is not a denial of subaltern agency, but a recognition that if the imperial archive that is currently available for analysis is the product of the institutions which did not address the entire colonialisied population, then it is one which does not record the entire range of responses and resistances to colonialism. Sharpe (1989:141-2) has noted that education in colonial India was not an instrument of universal colonial subjection, but a means of

constructing an educated indigenous English speaking colonial elite.⁹ Responding to Parry's reading of colonial discourse theory, she argues that "the tropes of 'mimicry', 'sly civility', and 'hybridity' that Bhabha deploys to stage the ambivalence of colonial discourse are all derived from discourses aimed at the colonial production of an educated class of native." (138). Bhabha's examples of 'the native subject' (1984a, 1985a, 1985b) are not identical to the subaltern subject, and his account of colonial ambivalence does not belong to a theoretical problematic identical to Spivak's account of subalternity. Sharpe suggests that Parry does however read Bhabha's native subject as identical to the subaltern, and charges that her demand for the 'native voice', by homogenising the heterogeneity of colonised subject positions, reproduces the gesture by which the British civilising mission constructed a small educated elite which was taken to be the metonymic substitute for all indigenous groups (1989:139). Thus, Sharpe suggests that the eagerness to have the native speak from out of the colonial archive risks effacing the subaltern as such, since "the colonised subject who can answer back is the product of the same vast ideological machinery that silences the subaltern." (143). This underscores Spivak's insistence on 'speaking' requiring a space of response to which access under colonialism was tightly policed. The potential for the appropriation of the ambivalent enunciatory address of colonial discourse is thus not available to all. If Bhabha's account of colonial ambivalence identifies the potential agency of resistance in those Caliban-like figures who are ascribed a degree of subject-status in the

⁹ Fabian (1986) and Miller (1990) make the same point with respect to the institutionalisation of European languages in colonial Africa.

discourses of colonialism, then Spivak's subaltern subjects are perhaps best thought of as 'Caliban's women', all those who are silenced by the very same apparatus through which he was taught language and learnt how to curse back at the usurping Prospero (Zabus, 1994).

Allegorising Theory

The full significance of Spivak's account of subalternity can be illustrated if we consider the use she has made of J. M. Coetzee's re-writing of *Robinson Crusoe* in *Foe* (1986) as the 'didactic occasion' for a consideration of certain theoretical arguments.¹⁰ Spivak alights upon this text to challenge the desire of those in positions of interpretative authority to give voice to marginalised or oppressed groups (e.g. Spivak 1992d:193). Her reading of *Foe* is framed by a consideration of the critical double bind defined by the poles of a Eurocentric arrogance to presume to be responsible for the universality of human kind, founded upon a faith in the unlimited access to other cultures, and on the other hand, the opposed position that "only the marginal can speak for the margin." (1991:155).

Spivak is drawn to the "errant scene of writing" that Coetzee's novel stages towards its end (1991:170-3). In Defoe's novel, Crusoe teaches Friday to speak; in *Foe* he has no tongue. Susan Barton's desire to tell her story runs up against the doubled absence of Friday's tongue - just how it came to be cut out is the truth that eludes her and which keeps her story of her time spent on

¹⁰ Coetzee's fiction thematises the dynamics of colonial inscription and silencing, and offers a critique of the effort to ventriloquize the voices of the oppressed. It is this concern with speech and silence which is most frequently alighted upon by those for whom his fiction is the exemplary form of postcolonial writing. For an introduction to the contexts of Coetzee's theoretical and literary work, see: Coetzee, 1992, and Atwell, 1993.

Cruso's island from being complete, yet Friday cannot tell her that truth. She holds to a phonocentric conception of writing: writing as the mere transcription of speech, and speech as the register of identity and the medium of self-consciousness. It thus remains a phallogentric order of writing to which Susan demands entry for herself as a woman. She decides to teach Friday to write, so that the full truth of the circumstances by which he came to lose his tongue might be known. But the promise of writing as the bearer of consciousness and truth, as the substitute for Friday's voice, is immediately recognised as problematic. She draws a house on a slate, and then writes the four letters 'h-o-u-s' underneath it. When Friday repeats the inscription, Susan is forced to admit that he might simply have been copying without understanding conceptually.

Following her first attempt to teach Friday writing, Susan and 'Daniel Foe' fall into conversation:

"While Foe and I spoke, Friday had settled himself on his mat with the slate. Glancing over his shoulder, I saw he was filling it with a design of, as it seemed, leaves and flowers. But when I came closer I saw the leaves were eyes, open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes.

I reached out to take the slate, to show it to Foe, but Friday held tight to it. 'Give! Give me the slate, Friday!' I commanded. Whereupon, instead of obeying me, Friday put

three fingers in his mouth and wet them with spittle and rubbed the slate clean.” (Coetzee, 1986:147).

Spivak re-writes this episode as a lesson about identity: “Friday, the slave whose tongue has been cut off, actually writes something on his slate, “on his own”, when the metropolitan anticolonial white woman wants to teach him writing. And when she, very anxious, wants to see it, he withholds it, he withholds it by rubbing it off, *idamāda* as erasure.” (Spivak, 1992a:793). This final remark refers to Spivak’s exploration of the Bengali *idamāda* as “a weird translation for identity”, one which foregrounds identity as an indicative or enclitic effect, always situated in relation to the proximity of a particular self (773-4). Here, then, identity as an iterable effect, and therefore something which exceeds any representation which simply privileges ‘speech’ or ‘voice’ as figures for the expression of a self-identical subjectivity, is the lesson for which Spivak turns to Coetzee’s novel for support.¹¹

To construct texts as having ‘voices’ inscribed within them which await re-articulation through the medium of the critic is to inscribe colonial textuality within a quite conventional economy of sense which ascribes to ‘voice’ and ‘speech’ the values of expressivity, self-presence, and consciousness, and understands the absence of such signs as ‘silence’, as an intolerable absence of ‘voice’, and therefore as the mark of disempowerment.

This continues to be the conception underwriting Parry’s recent critique of

¹¹ Gates (1987) also provides an account of identity as always already inhabited by non-presence and repetition in his discussion of African-American literature. On this reading, the articulation of a ‘voice’ is understood not as arising out of identity, but rather is the effect of articulating differences. Similarly, Johnson (1987:164) argues that the expression of a sense of self is dependent not on reducing difference to identity, but on maintaining and articulating the constitutive relation between identity and difference, speech and silence. On this account, “[t]he sign of an authentic voice is [...] not self-identity but self-difference”.

Coetzee's work. While for Spivak, Friday's silence exemplifies the mute interrogation and displacement of the discursive power of colonialism, Parry reads the representation of silence across the range of Coetzee's fiction as symbolising a transcendental liberation from subjectivity which re-enacts the appropriation of narrative authority by the white subject. She acknowledges that the typically taciturn figures in Coetzee's fiction may indeed be read as withholding speech as a form of resistance, but prefers to charge that they might also be read as "victims of textual strategies that disempower them by situating them outside the linguistic order." (Parry, 1991:199). Parry wonders whether this muteness is not indicative of "a narrative disinclination to orchestrate a polyphonic score, because of which the silences remain incommensurable, unknowable and unable to make themselves heard in the sealed linguistic code exercised by the narrative self, and hence incapable of disturbing the dominant discourse" (1993c:5). This recalls the charge that the refusal of the contemporary critic to recover 'voices' confounds the effects of colonial silencing. Coetzee's "conjuring and valorizing of a non-verbal signifying system" (6) is thus considered a retreat from a proper, political, writing practice. Parry asks "does not Coetzee's own principled refusal to exercise the power of the dominant culture by speaking for the other itself paradoxically perform the discursive process of silencing?" (1991:199). The implication that the only proper political gesture is to speak for the margin within hegemonic sites disallows the sort of reading provided by Attridge (1992), who considers Friday to be a figure for the silence upon which cultural formations are constituted and depend, which in turn renders them always

open to transformation. On this reading, Friday's erasure is seen as Coetzee's staging of the refusal to endorse the call for granting a voice to the oppressed within existing structures of socio-cultural discourse. Parry's impatience with such alternative readings of the significance of Coetzee's work suggests that 'the political' in her own reading remains unquestioned and premised on a quite conventional economy of value with respect to speech and silence.

Spivak reads Friday's stubborn act of erasure as an allegory for the deconstructive principle that speech and silence might always be inscribed within a different economy of value.¹² The design inscribed by Friday, precisely by virtue of being an inscription, imposes a limit on the project of interpretation: "Are those walking eyes rebuses, hieroglyphs, ideograms, or is their secret that they hold no secret at all? Each scrupulous effort at decoding or deciphering will bring its own rewards; but there is a structural possibility that they are nothing." (Spivak 1991:171-2). Spivak uses this episode to insist that the possibility cannot be excluded that 'silence', as an act of withholding, might be a mark of agency: "For every territorial space that is value coded by colonialism *and* every command of metropolitan anti-colonialism for the native to yield his 'voice', there is a space of withholding, marked by a secret that may or may not be a secret but cannot be unlocked. 'The native', whatever that might mean, is not only a victim, he or she is also an agent." (172). In a twist which upsets much conventional theoretical wisdom, Spivak raises the possibility that to presume to represent the silence of the subaltern as if it were

¹² Spivak's discussion of aphonie (1993a) also considers the ways in which silence can be considered constitutive of communication, an understanding which disrupts the notion that silence is a negation of speech as a figure for subjectivity. Cheung (1993) and Miller (1990:246-93) provide accounts of alternative inscriptions of the values ascribed to silence in writing.

potential 'speech' (whether to be spoken in its own voice or that of the critic) might, in principle, be to actually misrepresent what is already a mark of agency registered in the very absence of the conventional signifiers of 'voice'.¹³ If subaltern agency may reside in withholding, then the demand to project the presence of a voice into textual 'silences' always risks effacing agency in the gesture of its recovery. To transcribe silence into speech through the medium of writing may itself be an act of violence, one which fails to recognise the forms of resistance which can be articulated by the deployment of silence.

Spivak argues that Friday's silence marks the limit of interpretation, and must not be recuperated in the attempt, made in good faith, to recover silenced voices. To the charge that she "will not let the native speak", she characterises Parry's position as that of the anti-colonialist who "longs for the object of a conscientious ethnography" which can recover an autonomous realm where subalternity has inscribed its own traditions, meanings and knowledges (ibid.). In response to this hope and desire, Spivak remarks that "my particular word to Parry is that her efforts (to give voice to the native) as well as mine (to give warning of the attendant problems) are judged by those strange margins of which Friday with his withholding slate is only the mark." (173). Friday's act of erasure makes visible that Susan's notion of identity as propriety over one's own voice requires that the negotiation with the wholly

¹³ Friday's writing lesson concludes with Susan watching him as he produces "writing of a kind, rows upon rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together." (Coetzee, 1986:152). Coetzee (1992:404) holds that "[t]he O, the circle, the hole are symbols of that which male authoritarian language cannot appropriate", and this suggests that Friday's inscription might be read as the mark of an alternative system of signifying practices which cannot be appropriated by the phallogocentric order of language, to which Susan has gained access, without a degree of violence.

other be finessed, but Friday remains visible as the guardian of a significant silence calling to attention the constitutive relation between voice-as-identity and difference.

The equation of speech with empowerment and of silence with disempowerment and oppression is not rejected absolutely by Spivak, but the limits of this economy of meaning are made visible. The responsibility to represent and the commitment to the values conventionally represented by tropes of speech and voice is irreducible, but it is necessary to be constantly aware of the limits and conditions of one's own critical practice. To ignore the possibility that silence marks another space of agency, by demanding that it always be transformed into articulate speech, is to accord with an established metaphysics of speech and silence and its implied conception of 'the political' and to place it beyond question. And what this metaphysics installs is an interpretation of interpretation in which the question of the institution of meaning is systematically occluded.

(Re-)Instituting the Trace

Parry considers the 'subaltern' in Spivak's text as a direct referent for the disenfranchised subjectivity of the colonised. Thus she reads Spivak as theorising about 'native agency'. It is precisely this significance which is routinely attached to the subaltern in contemporary cultural theory, but it rests upon a strong misreading of Spivak's texts on this subject. She has remarked tellingly that "everybody thinks the subaltern is just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie." (1992c:45). Any reading of Spivak's work on the 'subaltern' must locate the specific sense the term carries in that work. She is certainly quite clear about what it does *not* signify for her: "Please do not confuse it with unorganized labour, women as such, the proletariat, the colonised, the object of ethnography, migrant labour, political refugees, etc. Nothing useful comes out of this confusion." (1995:115). If the subaltern isn't any of these, and Spivak is not concerned with a general theorisation of agency, then what is her discussion of subaltern representation concerned with? Lazarus (1994:205) captures the precise significance of her deployment of the term: "Spivak's theory of subalternity does not seem to me to be a theory of 'native agency' at all, but a theory of the way in which disenfranchised elements of the 'native population' are *represented* in the discourse of colonialism. The subaltern is for Spivak not a colonised person but a discursive figure in a battery of more or less integrated dominant cultural texts." The category of the 'subaltern' in Spivak's work needs to be understood as a strictly textual figure which she

uses to foreground certain questions about the contemporary politics of the work of reading an historical archive of colonialist textuality.

I would suggest that Spivak's subaltern be read as an alternative figure for the Derridean trace. Derrida describes the trace as "where the relationship with the other is marked" (1976:47). The trace must be *instituted* (46) for there to any be signification and legibility. This necessary closure as the condition of any meaning involves the occultation of the constitutive relation with alterity, yet the other remains to haunt the institution and make visible its potential for transformation. Spivak's account of the 'subaltern' attaches the Derridean theme more explicitly to the institutional legacies of imperialism, and signals a constant attention to the relation between the work of reading and writing about historically marginalised groups and the institutional conditions and complicities of such work.¹⁴

The subaltern stands on the margins of the graphematic space which opens all subjectivity. If difference and repetition are constitutive of subjectivity, it is nonetheless necessary to posit the subject by finessing this graphematic structure: "We are obliged to assume a pre-originary source without differences in the interests of suppressing that 'graphematic' structure at the inauguration of our texts." (Spivak, 1989b:214). Thus, to be the subject of a speech act that can be spoken in one's own voice, it is necessary to dance the deconstructive 'two-step': "There is no one who can speak if she does not

¹⁴ Readings of Spivak's account of subalternity which overlook the 'classical' deconstructionist inflections of her work reproduce the 'Can the subaltern speak?' dilemma in purely epistemological and tragically individualising form, by failing to register that it is the institutional apparatuses of representation which are being opened to question. Ironically then, it is often the frequent invisibility of deconstruction in commentaries on Spivak which lead to the failure to identify the materialist register of her work. The same is of course true of those accounts which read Spivak's appropriation of deconstruction as signalling mere textualism.

suppose that there is something at the beginning which is a unit. If you look carefully, you will see that this unit is itself divided from something it seems to repeat.” (Spivak, 1989a:211). This necessary covering over of the differential ‘origin’ of subjectivity leaves a trace. It is possible to read this mark as a sign of an absent presence, as a silence which can be rearticulated as speech. But a reading where the trace is made to look like the presence of an absent subject must acknowledge that this is “only because I have decided to decipher it” (212). In particular, it must be acknowledged that the decision to decipher the trace as a possible subject, to read the representation of subalternity in the colonial archive as the mark of the absent presence of subaltern consciousness, is one which excludes the “possibility of the *radically* heterogeneous” (1988b:105).

The persistent representation of agency and resistance in terms of speech and voice limits the potential range of actions which might be recognised as resistance, and one might further suggest that this limitation itself informs a particular and more or less unacknowledged understanding of the form ‘the political’ to which intellectuals critics consider themselves responsible. The issue at stake here is best expressed in the set of rhetorical questions posed by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:31): “Does an act require *explicit* consciousness and articulation to be properly called “resistance”? Should the term apply only to the intentions behind social and political acts, or may it refer equally to their consequences?” O’Hanlon (1988) suggests that feminist discussions of female subalternity point towards an alternative conception which is able to mark the presence of resistance without locating

the source of such resistance within the interiority of a classically conceptualised subjectivity. The injunction to recover the subaltern as a subject with a 'voice' "always threatens to reduce the single distinctive feature of subalternity which can be identified with certainty, its alterity, or the 'alienness' of its nature from our own." (211). In particular, the demand that the subaltern must be represented as having a 'voice', and the claim that any affirmation of silence is a betrayal of the imperative to represent resistance, works only to privilege a masculine form of heroic rebellion (214-5). This is evident from the direction taken by ongoing discussions of the significance of discourses about widow immolation in colonial India, discourses in which the widow serves as the site upon which debates about the status of tradition and modernity are staged (Mani, 1987). This has become the exemplary model of the epistemic violence of imperialism, which effaces those subject-positions from which the women involved might speak as the subjects of their actions and utterances: "The critical recovery of the sati's consciousness and subjectivity has become a recurrent but fraught project, consonant with the recent preoccupation in writings on colonial discourse in general and South Asian historiography in particular with the agency of the oppressed subject." (Loomba, 1993:217). Mani (1990:36) argues that many discussions of *sati* remain locked within a binary opposition of coercion or consent which forecloses wider conceptions of agency and resistance (cf. Nair, 1994). That discussions of subaltern agency have been pursued through treatments of *sati* thus indicates that the task of re-theorising agency involves the displacement of an implicitly gendered set of understandings which posit an opposition

between volition and subjugation and represent them with signifiers of speech and silence respectively. Resistance may take the form of evasion and silence, rendering the representation of agency as 'voice' inappropriate. The multiple and complex variety of forms of resistance which it is possible to identify are not all subsumable beneath a conception of politics where the tropes of 'speech' and 'voice' organise understandings of agency and empowerment. And this opens up the possibility of understanding agency as a subject-effect which is constituted out of the contradictions of multiple subject positions produced by overlapping discourses (Smith, 1988), a conception for which the metaphysics of the 'voice' is no longer adequate.

In her commentary on the *Subaltern Studies* group, Spivak (1988b:204-5) insists that the positing of the subaltern consciousness as a presence which can be recovered from the imperial archive is "a theoretical fiction to entitle a project of reading" made in "a scrupulously visible political interest". This decision is one she commends, but she does so precisely to insist on the imperative of making visible its status as a *decision* made in the light of certain specifiable interests, and also to suggest thereby that it does not exhaust the field of possible approaches to reading. The project of interpretation is finally inadequate to historical actuality itself: "the arena of the subaltern's persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogeneous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian. The historian must persist in his efforts in this awareness, that the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic." (207). In so far as debates between different academic discourses over

the proper treatment of subalternity remain institutionally disciplined modes of knowledge, Spivak insists that it is well for those engaged in such debates to remember that their interests necessarily remain “heterogeneous to, and discontinuous with, subaltern practice” (208). This recognition of different interests and differential power relations between spheres of social practice addresses a challenge to any unproblematised claim that the critic or historian shares identical interests to the subaltern subjects whose insurgency they reconstruct.

It is worth noting that the insistence on the strictly textual purchase of ‘subaltern’ is based on the refusal to collapse the difference between representations of social practices and non-textual practices, a refusal which opens a space for reflection on the institutional specificity of the work of interpretation. What Spivak’s work foregrounds is the discontinuity between the act of historical interpretation and the ‘object’ under examination. It thus serves as a reminder that historical research involves a *work of reading* that goes on in particular sorts of institutional spaces, and that as such it is important not to confuse the practices and consciousness of social groups with the representations (or absence of representations) provided of them in the available archives.

Agencies of Interest

Parry's position implies that there is professional interest at stake only for those who are suspicious of strategies of recuperation. Yet, as Robbins notes (1993:205), if it is true "that to deny the voice and agency of the native can serve to affirm professional authority" then it is equally true that "to *affirm* the voice and agency of the native can also serve to affirm professional authority". Likewise, Berubé (1992:16-17) notes that "the rhetoric of marginality can be a powerful enabling device, even though marginality itself is synonymous with disempowerment: to claim to speak from the margin is paradoxically to speak from the position of authority, and to describe a margin is to describe an authoritative challenge to hegemony."¹⁵ The different approaches to the work of reading the imperial archive are both constituted by specific sets of interests. Appiah (1991b) has suggested that different fields of theoretical inquiry are constituted by different interests. In particular, he suggests that the interests served by the discourse of the subject might be different from those served by the discourse of structure. The theoretical economy of the subject serves the interest of articulating our activities with those of others (79-80), by projecting a minimal degree of shared rationality onto the traces of alterity found in representations of cultural difference (Appiah, 1992:234-7). Alternatively, the theoretical economy of structure enables the analysis of structures of exploitation (Appiah, 1991b:82), and can serve as a corrective to over-optimistically emphasising the potentials for

¹⁵ Spivak has increasingly focused on the potential pitfalls associated with the institutionalisation of marginality and the attendant dangers of a 'new orientalism' (1993b:57; 1989c; cf. Gates, 1992).

social or discursive transformation. Given the reading of subalternity as bearing directly upon the theorisation of agency, Spivak's account will necessarily appear to overestimate the degree of determinate effectivity of a discourse upon its subjects, and it is indeed routinely taken as a confirmation of the apparent inability of post-structuralism to locate the conditions for transgressive action and resistance (e.g. Ortner, 1995). Discussion of subalternity in colonial discourse and postcolonial theory thus continues to be framed by what Appiah calls "the agon of structure and agency." (68). Debates about subalternity take on the appearance of the literary humanities version of the sorts of structure-versus-agency debates that are common in the social sciences. And consequently the reading of Spivak's work is routinely organised by same the ethico-theoretical imperative to assert in theory and find in practice traces of agency.

Appiah's suggestion that we rethink structure and agency so that it is no longer assumed that they form an oppositional pair competing for the same explanatory space illuminates the issues at stake in the tensions around which colonial discourse theory is formed. He suggests that "we should see the relations between structural explanation and the logic of the subject as a competition not for causal space but for narrative space: as different levels of theory, with different constitutive assumptions, whose relations make them neither competitive nor mutually constitutive, but quite contingently complementary." (74). Accordingly, different accounts should not be judged according to their apparent explanatory power, but first of all in relation to what interests they serve to sustain or subvert in the contingencies of their

deployment. On this view, the taken for granted assumption that traces of resistance have to be found for a reading to carry any oppositional political force is opened up to question. Gestures of recuperating native ‘voices’ which obscure the paradox that any such voice is figured only in texts written from within specific institutions harbour a ‘professional conceit’ whereby the strategy of recovery actually serves not only “to turn the silence of the subaltern into speech, but to make their words address our own concerns, and to render their figures in our self-image.” (O’Hanlon, 1988:211). That is, the use of the figure of the ‘voice’ secures the posited identity of interests between the contemporary critic and the historical agents to whom they direct their attention. This is simultaneously a disavowal of institutional location and of the interests which accrue from this. Finding agency in texts is as much the work of particular professional situations as is the act of denying its presence, and following Appiah, the value of either emphasis cannot be determined without considering the institutional contingencies out of which it is made.

As Robbins (1993:187) suggests, “[i]t is arguable that, as a critical procedure or paradigm, the formulaic recovery of inspirational agency may foster political quiescence, while a more politicized criticism might in fact result from a focus on vaster, less anthropomorphic, less hortatory structures.” In response to his rhetorical question “why *do* we all value agency so highly?” (ibid.), one might suggest that the value that is accorded to agency in contemporary critical theory needs to be openly acknowledged as one which serves the interests of oppositional academics in their institutional situations. Thus, O’Hanlon (1988:219) suggests that strategies aimed at the recovery of

subaltern agency need to be thought of not as projects which directly align the academic with the struggles of those subaltern subjects, but rather, when it is asked “why we seek to find a resistant presence which has not been completely emptied or extinguished by the hegemonic, our answer must surely be that it is in order to envisage a realm of freedom in which we ourselves might speak.” Finding traces of resistance and agency provides the oppositional academic with a lever with which to challenge and displace the totalising, coherent, and linear historical narratives which characterise dominant disciplinary discourses. O’Hanlon’s position suggests that the professional conceit involved in strategies of recuperation, once recognised as such, should lead to the admission that there are quite legitimate interests which oppositional academics have *as* academics and not in spite of their institutional placement, and that these should not be disavowed in a guilty and anxious eagerness to claim an immediate identity of political interest with the struggles going on in other social arenas. Such an acknowledgement, we might suppose, is the first step towards accurately discerning just where oppositional academic practices might be articulated with wider movements for social change (Rowe, 1993).

The dilemmas of responsibility which follow from problematising the work of representation in academic discourse give rise to what Sharpe (1989:151) identifies as the predicament of those who claim to speak on behalf of colonial and post-colonial insurgency finding it necessary to provide “elaborate alibis that efface our role as translators and transmitters so that the native voice might appear authentic.” Yet any such ruse of transparency serves

to hide the fact that the colonised is thus enabled to answer back only through the organised institutions and networks of literacy and writing which were once the very instruments of their historical marginalisation. Any such 'voice' can only ever articulate "inauthentic knowledge" as a consequence (152). Thus, following Spivak, Sharpe argues that the subaltern has to be considered as both "irreducible and yet ultimately irretrievable" (ibid.). This is not a call to consider subalternity as a metaphysical figure of timeless alterity, nor is it an abdication of the responsibility to represent. It marks the point at which a commitment is made not to efface the institutional locations out of which all representations emerge, and it underwrites the conviction that "the fact of our institutional occupations must inhabit any attempt to address strategic silences through counter-discourses and alternative narratives." (139).

Appiah leads us towards a different reading of the insistence found in the work of Spivak and others on the irreducible alterity of subaltern subjects. We are now in a position to see that it is precisely the making visible of the question of institutional interests itself which is at stake in this insistence. In response to the claim that Spivak's account of subalternity is an act of professional self-aggrandisement, we can only note that she considers it a prerequisite for the radical academic to "attend to the nature of the institution that is their contractual space" and not to make one's "institutional commitment invisible" (1993:294). She questions the confidence of those who claim to let the oppressed speak in their own voices as if without any institutional mediation by imagining themselves as the transparent conduit of subaltern agency. Spivak's account of subalternity is directed at maintaining a

“vigilance precisely against too great a claim for transparency” (1988a:393) when undertaking the irreducible responsibility to produce representations.

Reading Fragments

I have suggested that the ‘standard model’ of colonial discourse as a fantasy projection of the imperialist desires of the West might be inadequate for a number of reasons. Foremost amongst these is that this account tends to run counter to the most destabilising effects of this very same range of theory. These lie in the critique of notions of Western society and culture as a self-enclosed and self-generating entity. The projection-model reaches an impasse over the treatment of non-Western agency in the production of colonial and imperial knowledge. An imperative of any reading of the imperial archive must be to mark the conditions of inextricable imbrication out of which that archive was formed. However, when we turn to those discussions which have endeavoured to theorise the inscription of non-Western resistance, we find that the project of recovering the traces of agency turns out to be highly disputed. In particular, the gesture of recuperating previously unacknowledged or silenced voices runs the risk of actually effacing the very alterity out of which such resistance emerges. There is a tension between the desire to locate sites of resistance in order to show the limits and fissures of dominant discourses in our own professional spaces, and the imperative to respect the alterity and difference of subalternity. This is not an opposition which offers an easy choice between two alternatives - it forms the strictly undecidable network in which the question of responsibility is foregrounded (Spivak, 1994).

My discussion of contemporary theories of colonial discourse has, then, only clarified my own particular impasse a little more precisely: how to read the particular archive I have in view in such a way as to recover from its margins the constitutive role of non-Western subjects as agents of knowledge, without presuming that it is possible to recover in full the forms of geographical knowledge and self-understanding of those agents? To make this latter presumption would be to ignore the irreversible epistemic violence that the grafting of local knowledges into the imperial archive involved. And it would thus efface the cultural work which colonial discourses do, by presuming that what has been lost is nevertheless still present and waiting to be recovered in authentic form from the depths of the texts which were the very products and mediums of processes of dispossession and erasure.

How then to proceed? What form of reading-work can negotiate these two apparently incompatible imperatives: to simultaneously recover the agency of non-Western 'others' in the production of knowledge without reducing the very alterity of those agents? Prakash (1992:177) argues that while it is not possible to recover what has been suppressed, it is possible to critically address the effects of this suppression "by writing histories of irretrievable subject positions, by sketching the traces of figures that come to use only as disfigurements." By bearing witness to the effacement of subject-positions which survive not quite as "just noise" (cf. O'Hanlon and Washbrook, 1992:149), but not as fully audible voices either, such a practice of reading-work would not presume to restore these original figures, but by simultaneously marking irreducible and irretrievable subject-positions, would

affirm the limits of contemporary interpretative authority, thereby opening a space in which a constant reflection on the contingent aims and purposes of critical academic work is demanded. This sort of reading will be organised around Spivak's (1985:146) question: "As the historical record is made up, who is dropped out, when and why?" In different discourses, particular subjects will be posited as interlocutors, while in others treated as objects of discourse and denied any subject-position. These matters need to be specified, either prior to analysis, or be made the very subject of analysis of colonial discourse itself. Thus, as Mani (1992:403) suggests, the question 'Can the subaltern speak?' needs to be decomposed: "Which groups constitute the subalterns in any text? What is their relationship to each other? How can they be heard to be speaking or not speaking in a given set of materials? With what effects?"

Rushdie (1991:12) suggests that the will to totalise historical memory is a function of the very partiality of the historical record: "Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood games, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death." The incomplete character of a historical archive made from the 'shards of memory' tends to elevate each fragment to a symbolic status whereby it stands in for a lost totality which might be reconfigured through this same fragment. This rests ultimately on the view that communication must take place in a common space of shared meaning, and any work of reading organised around this

understanding will be driven by an unacknowledged imperative that different systems of meaning and signification must be made to communicate to us in our terms (Gregory, 1994:140-50). Rather than follow the path of this hermeneutic will-to-mean and its implied procedures of reducing difference to identity, we need to approach reading-work in a way that will enable the acknowledgement of non-Western agency without reducing its alterity by presuming to give 'voice' to the subaltern, and this requires that we depart from a notion that the work of reading moves towards meaning-full-ness. This is made clear by Pratt's (1986b, 1986c, 1987) critique of those theories of language and discourse which presume, as their regulative ideal, linguistic communities wherein communication is secured by a single shared horizon of meaning. This critique is the condition for an alternative conception, which informs her own work on discourses of colonialism and otherness (1985, 1988, 1992), of a 'linguistics of contact' which would place at its heart "the operation of language across lines of social differentiation, a linguistics that focused on modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups, between persons of different and multiple identities, speakers of different languages, that focused on how such speakers constituted each other relationally and in difference, how they enact differences in language." (1987:60).

The temptation to project meaning into gaps, silences, and elisions is, following Richards (1993), the very dynamic of the 'fantasy of empire' which underwrote the 'archivalisation of local knowledges' within a single global system of knowledge. It is surely incumbent upon us not to fall prey to the

temptation to construct an imaginary totalised past, peopled by shadowy figures resembling our own representations of ourselves: “The only thing we know is that “be like me, be my image” can never be on the agenda.” (Spivak, 1993a:28). The fractured qualities of the historical record demands that reading be understood as translation: as a transformative practice which preserves difference while also confirming it as the very possibility of communication.¹⁶ Such reading-work must make visible and reflect upon the partiality of memory-construction which is always condemned to work with a selectively fragmented historical record. Reading colonial discourse will not therefore produce a singular unified narrative “but rather a series of fragments which, read speculatively, hint at a story that can never be fully recovered.” (Hulme, 1986:12).

To further specify the dimensions of such a work of reading, we need to step backwards towards those traditions of thought which share a certain family resemblance in so far as they are distinguished by a suspicion of hermeneutic conceptions of reading, subjectivity, and meaning. And given that we have already suggested the ethnocentric limits of such hermeneutic understandings, it is to post-structuralism, understood as critically engaging with Eurocentrism, to which we shall turn our attention. It is in a certain notion of *literal* reading that we shall locate a materialist practice of reading-work able to hold in tension the irreducible imperatives identified above as the organising principles of our examination of colonial geographical knowledge.

¹⁶ See: Benjamin, 1968:69-82; De Man, 1986:73-105; Derrida, 1985a; Miller, 1987:122-127; Niranjana, 1992; Spivak, 1992b

3

READING 'TEXT' AND 'CONTEXT'

'There is nothing outside the text'

It remains a common characterisation amongst both critics and defenders of what has become geography's 'postmodernism' to present post-structuralism as a tradition which considers language as a self-referential system of signification. Rather than reproduce those characterisations which are framed by apocalyptically metaphysical or abstractly epistemological considerations (cf. Barnett, 1993), I want here to treat deconstruction as bearing upon the *question of reading* by discussing how notions of text and context are refashioned in Derrida's work.¹

It is deconstruction that has apparently been responsible for making it philosophically respectable to refuse any concern with extra-textual reference or determination when engaged in interpretation. This understanding is common across a whole range of disciplinary polemics about postmodernism and post-structuralism, and it rests on the ritual repetition of Derrida's provocative remark that "there is nothing outside the text [there is no outside-

¹ The following account of deconstruction is necessarily partial, constructed as it is to illuminate particular problems addressed in this work. Derrida has often insisted that deconstruction cannot be reduced to a method. Deconstruction *does* nonetheless have some more or less specifiable 'methodological' consequences, and it is my aim here to tease these out: "Deconstruction is not a method. It has some methodological effects. There are some general rules that in certain limited situations you can draw out of deconstruction and apply." (Derrida, 1987:262).

text]”, the “axial proposition” of deconstructive ‘method’ (Derrida, 1976:158; 163). To appreciate the full implications of this comment requires us to attend to the sort of *generalisation* of notions such as ‘text’ and ‘writing’ which is effected in his writings.

One of the authoritative sources for the notion that Derrida’s approach is nothing more than a form of textual idealism is Foucault. In response to Derrida’s ‘Cogito and the History of Madness’ (1978b:31-63), Foucault (1979b:27) produced a vitriolic attack on Derrida’s work as being nothing other than a ‘little pedagogy’ that “teaches the pupil that there is nothing outside the text, but that in it, in its gaps, its blanks, and its silences, there reigns the reserve of the origins; that it is therefore unnecessary to search elsewhere, but that here, not in the words, certainly, but in the words under erasure, in their *grid*, the ‘sense of being’ is said.” Foucault’s intervention adds weight to the frequent juxtaposition of his and Derrida’s work, whereby the former is valued for being ‘materialist’, ‘historical’ and ‘political’ by virtue of positive comparison with the latter. Spivak (1988a:91) summarises the basic understanding that arises from, and is legitimised by, this form of comparison: “Foucault deals with real history, real politics, and real social problems; Derrida is inaccessible, esoteric, and textualistic.” This view is typified by Said’s (1978b:674) summary proposition that “Derrida’s criticism therefore moves us *into* the text, Foucault’s *in* and *out*.” This reading betrays a failure to attend carefully to the specific way in which notions of ‘text’ and ‘textuality’ are constructed in Derrida’s work. Said’s comments about being left immersed in the text rests on an unproblematised notion of texts as simply

'books'. Yet it is precisely this sense of 'text' that Derrida sets out to contest. As Harvey (1990:77) puts it, deconstruction "disrupts the closure of the 'book' and transforms it into a 'text'." (cf. Derrida, 1976:6-26). It is only by failing to identify the ways 'text' and 'textuality' are thus transformed that one can construe deconstruction as 'narrowly textualist', as bracketing issues of reference, materiality, history, or the real:

"As I understand it, [...] the text is not the book; it is not confined in a volume itself confined to the library. It does not suspend reference - to history, to the world, to reality, to being, and especially not the other, since to say history, of the world, of reality, that they always appear in an experience, hence in a movement of interpretation which contextualises them according to a network of differences and hence of referral to the other, is surely to recall that alterity (difference) is irreducible. *Différance* is a reference and vice versa." (Derrida, 1988:137).

The presentation of deconstruction as remaining in the text, refusing to move beyond it to 'context', is the sign of a failure to comprehend how accepted relations between text and context, language and reality, inside and outside, which many criticisms continue to honour in the very structure of their criticism, are reinscribed in a new distribution of meaning, through the 'generalisation of writing' and of 'text' that Derrida pursues in his work.

Derrida has gone to some length to counter interpretations of his work which rest on not only a *misrepresentation*, but a "stubborn refusal to read"

(1985c:16). He dismisses as so many ‘stupidities’ (1984:123) the notion that post-structuralism, and his work especially, effects a denial of the referentiality of language, or an insistence that there is nothing beyond language:

“It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always concerned with the ‘other’ of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the ‘other’ and the ‘other of language’.”

(ibid.).

Deconstruction problematises received notions of language and reference, suggesting they are perhaps more complex than current understandings allow, but to complicate received conceptualisations is not the same as suggesting that all there is is language:

“To argue that there is no absolute outside of the text is not to postulate some ideal immanence, the incessant reconstitution of writings relation to itself.” (Derrida, 1981a:35).

What animates the deconstruction of ‘logocentrism’ is the resistance to the tendency to reduce phenomena to language which characterises idealist thought. Hegel is the exemplary case of this attempt to sublimate the ‘outside’ into the concept or *logos*, and it is against this which Derrida’s discussions of the ‘text’ are aimed:

“The text affirms the outside, marks the limits of this speculative operation, deconstructs and reduces to the status of ‘effects’ all the predicates through which speculation appropriates the outside.” (ibid.).

It is not the ‘attachment’ of language and reality, of inside and outside, that is contested by deconstruction, but the ‘naturalness’ of any such connection - Derrida insists that thinking difference through concepts (*sic*) such as the ‘trace’, ‘text’, and ‘writing’ takes place “within a structure of reference” (1976:46).

At its simplest, the deconstructive approach to textuality proposes that the border between texts and reality is not a natural or given one, but that it is always constructed. The way the two relate, the way the one refers to the other, is not an unproblematic reflection or representation of a prior and given realm. The conveyance between infrastructures is what for Derrida is important; ‘everything is in the mediation’, there is only text in the sense that there is no realm of materiality to which we have *unmediated* access: “There is no pure infrastructure. There is no pure superstructure. There is only text.” (Derrida, 1985c:14). In this formulation we glimpse how deconstruction reworks traditional issues by insisting that we attend to how reference, meaning, and representation are produced as an effect of mediation between realms which are constituted through the very process of that mediation. We also have in this comment an indication of how Derrida uses ‘text’ to displace the conventional inside/outside dichotomy that continues to structure most understandings of texts and contexts. ‘Text’ becomes the figure and vehicle of

mediation itself, the means by which mediation between infrastructures is effected, and thus the identity of those infrastructures established. And this displacement of 'text' involves a refashioning of the very meaning of that concept itself. The aim is, for "strategic reasons", to "recast the concept of text by generalising it almost without limit, in any case without present or perceptible limit that *is*. That's why there is nothing '*beyond* the text'." (Derrida, 1986:167). Derrida's ruminations on textuality problematise the ways boundaries are constructed, including the boundary between what is normally considered a text, an enclosed space, and its outside, its context: "This is my starting point: no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation." (Derrida, 1979:81). Contexts cannot completely fix or determine meaning once and for all, because of the way the very distinction between text and context, inside and outside, is established - through mediation, the mobility and movement that renders the boundaries, edges, borders, and limits thus established always unstable and liable to deformation.

For Derrida, the question of the borderline precedes the determination of all dividing limits. It is with the issue of the determination of boundaries that Derrida's discussions of textuality are concerned. The question of how those elements distinguished by borders (fantasy/reality, ideas/matter, fiction/fact, etc.) actually relate cannot be properly posed except by problematising the boundary itself, the limit, the very means and operations of distinction, as the starting point:

“If we are to approach [*aborder*] a text, for example, it must have a *bord*, an edge.” (81).

“What are the borders of a text? How do they come about?”
(85).

It is around such questions that the issue of textuality is structured, reinscribing the sense of ‘the text’ in the process. The following specifies how the question of textuality fits in with the problematising of borders, and how it involves a displacement of the meanings ascribed to text and context:

“If we are to approach a text, it must have an edge. The question of the text, as it has been elaborated and transformed in the last dozen or so years, has not merely “touched” shore, *le bord..*, all those boundaries that form the running border of what used to be called a text, of what we once thought this word could identify, i.e., the supposed end and beginning of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, the signatures, the referential realm outside the frame, and so forth. What has happened, if it has happened, is a sort of overrun (*débordment*) that spoils all these boundaries and divisions and forces us to extend the accredited concept, the dominant notion of a “text”, of what I still call a “text” for strategic reasons, in part - a “text” that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus

the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines) - all the limits, everything that was set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not, every field of reference - to body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth). Whatever the demonstrated necessity of such an overrun, such a *dé-bordement*, it still will have come as a shock, producing endless efforts to dam up, resist, rebuild the old positions, to blame what could no longer be thought without confusion, to blame difference as wrongful confusion.” (84-5 [emphasis added]).

The transformation and generalisation of ‘text’ has indeed met with stiff resistance, but the very form of this resistance bears out the point of the challenge that deconstruction presents. The persistent interpretation of the Derridean inscription of textuality as proposing that we are stuck in the prison house of language rests on the construction and defence of a particular boundary between texts and contexts which produces the former narrowly defined as a ‘book’ or as ‘language’, sharply and categorically distinguished from something outside and prior to it, a pre-linguistic reality and an autonomous subject. In the reception of Derrida’s work one thus sees precisely the process to which he is calling attention: the fixing of boundaries as the prerequisite of being able to recognise what can and cannot be called a text or

context, and the refusal to countenance that texts may be understood differently. The reinscription of these notions opens up a line of questioning with regard to what boundaries are assumed as the condition for an activity, and what these boundaries occlude and make possible.

‘Texts’ are no longer understood as objects situated on one side of a pre-given boundary. Rather, ‘text’ is posed as the very form taken by the boundary itself, the means by which boundaries are established and transgressed. This repositioning of the place of the text involves a new sense of what texts and textuality are now understood as *networks* of relations, as differential *weaves*. This is a double displacement: firstly of the text from being on the one side of an inside/outside opposition, to being the means of mediation by which that division is constituted; and, secondly, in this move, a whole new vocabulary is introduced which transforms the normal meaning of ‘text’. This second operation, which supplements² the displacement of text to the position of negotiating boundaries and margins, involves the shift from the empirical and restricted sense of text, as marks and words on the page of a book, to an anterior sense of ‘text’ as a *woven texture*. Once we grasp the implications of this new sense of text, we can begin to see how far the generalisation of the text is both much more and much less than simply suggesting that ‘the world is like a text’.

² The ‘strange logic of the supplement’ characteristic of writing is such that what seems at first to be a secondary, unnecessary and superfluous addition to an apparently authentic and natural form (e.g. speech), turns out in fact to be necessary and essential to it, for it completes that which was thought to be already completed. Supplementarity thus marks the necessary non-adequation of any element to itself, its non-identity and dependence on a relation to alterity. The logic of the supplement upsets any clear distinction between insides and outsides, by marking “the originality of the lack that makes necessary the addition of the supplement.” (Derrida, 1976:214).

Derrida gives to textuality an *infrastructural* sense (1976:164), but in so doing infrastructure itself is reinscribed not as a substantial substratum, but as relational and differential (cf. Gasché, 1986). This reinscribed sense of ‘text’ departs from other conceptions through its critique of the notion of texts as closed, totalised, and having a strictly distinguished inside and outside. This is effected through the construction of textuality as a *weave*:

“The interweaving (*Verwebung*) of language, the interweaving of that which is purely language with the other threads of experience constitutes a cloth. The word *Verwebung* refers to this metaphorical zone. The “strata” one “weaves”, their intercomplication is such that the warp cannot be distinguished from the woof. If the stratum of the logos were simply *founded*, one could extract it and bring to light its underlying *stratum* of nonexpressive acts and contents. But since this superstructure acts back upon the *Unterschicht*³ in an essential and decisive manner, one is indeed obliged, from the very outset of the description, to associate a properly *textual* metaphor with the geological metaphor: for cloth means *text*. *Verweben* here means *texere*. The discursive is related to the non-discursive, the linguistic “stratum” is intermixed with the prelinguistic “stratum” according to a regulated system of a kind of *text*.” (Derrida, 1982:160).

³ Substratum (Derrida, 1982:159).

Here we see how ‘text’ is positioned as that which mediates realms, brings them into being as such by bringing them into relation. Textuality is the form of interrelation between realms. Derrida’s deconstruction of Husserl’s theory of the sign, from which the above comment is drawn, revolves around this question of the interweaving of different modalities of language use. Husserl admits that different components of signification (the ‘expressive’ and the ‘indicative’ functions) are interwoven or entangled in the practice of effective communication. But Derrida (1982:161) finds that phenomenology, “faced with this inextricable texture, this interlacing (*Verflechtung*)”, sets out to disentangle the weave, to reveal an ideal, absolute and simple ground of self-present signification. This is an impossible project, because “the texture of the text [...] is irreducible.” (ibid.). In the “problem of interweaving” (1973:29), Derrida identifies the conditions of impossibility for the complete realisation of the phenomenological project that haunt Husserl’s own text.

The same theme orientates the reading of Plato (Derrida, 1981a:163-171). Writing is found to be an irreducibly woven structure or fabric, composed of an “interlacing that weaves together the system of differences” (165), and which is responsible for the constant slipping of meaning of *pharmakon*, the word by which writing is figured as both poison and cure for spoken communication. The textual, tissue-like quality of writing consists of the operation of binding together different strands into a fabric, network, or web, which is figured in Plato’s own text by the word *sumploké* [interweaving] (66). The texture of writing is composed of the knotting together of heterogeneous elements. The text is the means of binding insides

and outsides in to a “weave of differences” (Derrida, 1982:xxiii). This heterogeneity which *is* textuality, is also explored in Derrida’s continuing encounter with Lévinas’s work (Derrida, 1978b:79-153; 1991). Derrida finds in Lévinas a form of writing that exemplifies the sense of textuality that he is elaborating in his own work. The general text is thus a “heterogeneous tissue” (1991:26) that brings elements into relation in a network of interruptions, interlacing them while respecting their irreducible alterity. By means of a vocabulary of the ‘rending’, ‘mending’, ‘binding’, and ‘knotting’ of threads, Derrida explores how Lévinas’s writing works.

Derrida thus appeals to a meaning of ‘text’ anterior to the common notion we tend to have. ‘Text’ is no longer understood in the restricted sense as script or book. Consistent with Derrida’s treatment of metaphor (1982:207-71), we should see the re-writing of textuality not as the metaphorical generalisation of the text, and perhaps not even as the discovery of an older, originary metaphor from which text arises, but rather as a *catachresis* - the “the violent production of meaning, an abuse which refers to no anterior or proper norm.” (1984:123). The genealogy of the word ‘text’ is traced to a particular tradition of biblical hermeneutics which adheres strictly to the organisation of written words, from which the deconstructive strategy of literal reading can be gleaned. Furthermore, it relates also to the Latin *textus* - that which is woven, a web or texture; from the verb *texere* - to weave.⁴ ‘Text’ is thus the process and product of such weaving of fabrics, cloths, textiles, tissues and webs. This is the sense of text and textuality that Derrida is

⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition (Clarendon Press, 1989), vol.XVII:851-855.

foregrounding across the range of his work. It is this woven character that represents the irreducible texture, the very textuality of texts. And this textuality is inextricable, it has no beginning or end, it is 'limitless'. We are always already woven into a heterogeneous texture. The interweaving of threads and strands, the acting back of 'secondary' threads on 'primary' threads renders all attempts to find an absolute origin or ground outside this weave, this structure of constitutive differential relations, impossible: "in what is spun in this way, it is precisely the operation of beginning which can no longer be grasped." (Derrida, 1982:160). Textuality is therefore irreducible: origins, beginnings, and absolute boundaries are effects of the interlacing that both produces and destabilises the relations between different elements. Deconstruction foregrounds the production of boundaries through differential and relational networks as its central concern, not the search for foundations and origins.

This understanding of the text clearly throws into new light what might be meant when Derrida proclaims that there is nothing outside the text, or that everything is text. There is nothing outside the weave that is the text, no-thing that cannot be comprehended without taking account of the irreducible relations which binds it to 'others'. 'Textuality' in the 'infrastructural sense' is not a substratum under a superstructure, and the understanding of the text as weave, as a network, is not the same as 'text' in the conventional sense of verbal text, which would have texts counterposed to something real and material:

“the concept of text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call “text” implies all the structures called “real”, “economic”, “historical”, socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed, or have been naive enough to believe and to have accused me of believing. But it does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this “real” except in an interpretative experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential referring. That’s all.”

(Derrida, 1988:148).

Spivak (1990b:12) follows this understanding in suggesting that textuality “refers to the possibility that every socio-political, psycho-sexual phenomenon is organised by, woven by many, many strands that are discontinuous, that come from way off, that carry their histories within them, and that are not within our control.” It is in this sense of the multiple overdetermination of social practices that one might talk of the “textuality of the socius” (120).

Derrida’s comments on the relation of his work to materialism are instructive here. He suggests that deconstruction should be understood as *materialist* (1981b:64), in so far as materialism is understood as being outside of the classical oppositions into which it is generally placed. ‘Matter’ must be

understood as “the absolute exterior of opposition” (66), which falls outside of pairs such as matter/spirit, matter/ideality, matter/form. It is this “materialist insistence” on the absolute exteriority of materiality to classical metaphysical oppositions that is invoked to guard the notion of textuality from simplistic misreadings:

“it seems to me that the materialist insistence can function as a means of having the necessary generalisation of the concept of text, its extension with no simple exterior limit (which also supposes the passage through the metaphysical opposition), not wind up (under the influence of very precise interests, reactive forces determined to lead work astray into confusion), not wind up, then, as the definition of a new self-interiority, a new “idealism”, if you will, of the text.” (66).

Textuality is here connected with materialism, where the latter is understood as the principle of radical alterity and heterogeneity, irreducible to classical philosophical oppositions.

This relation between textuality and the materialist insistence points up the distance which separates Derrida’s conception of the text from those which remain indebted to an unreconstructed structuralist conception of the sign. Saussure’s radically innovative theory of the sign remains determined by classical philosophical idealist oppositions in so far as it continues to exclude writing, which for Derrida is the figure *par excellence* of that form of alterity which cannot be subsumed within such oppositions. Derrida transforms the

structuralist account of the differential and relational nature of signification by posing to it the problem of writing:

“Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each “element” - phoneme or grapheme - being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text.”

(1981b:26).

The appearance of the notions of interweaving and textile in this comment indicate the transformation that a deconstructive reading effects of the Saussurian conception of signifiers and signs. The signifier and signified in structuralism remain rooted to a privileging of sound-images, to ‘phonocentrism’, focusing on the intelligible at the cost of the sensible represented by the figure of a degraded and secondary writing. In this exclusion of writing, Derrida finds that Saussure limited the radicality of the proposition that meaning is constructed differentially. He insists on the irreducibility of writing, as that which produces a much more radical notion of the differential construction of meaning, because writing disrupts presence through its heterogeneity, and its specific capacity to break with the values of presence and identity. ‘Writing’ and the ‘trace’ are figures of alterity, of a materiality that disrupts all oppositions which would subordinate it to principles of identity, ideality, and unity.

This difference between Derrida's textuality and structuralist notions of language as a signifying process indicates that the generalisation of the text involves something other than simply suggesting that all sorts of social realms might be understood in the same way as texts, when this latter is understood as a chain of signifiers - that the economy, politics, or the city, might be interpreted or read like texts. After deconstruction, if one were to make such a claim about some 'real' world event being 'textual' in some sense, then it would be necessary to take heed of Derrida's insistence that this "is not to say that it can be read the way one reads a book." (1986:168). The Derridean text is neither a book, nor a tissue of signs: "a text is never truly made up of 'signs' or 'signifiers'" (1981a:261).

Generalising Textuality

Derrida's considerations of textuality should not be mistaken for a very complex metaphor about the nature of society in general. The reason why he writes about weaving, networks of differential relations, etc., under the heading of 'texts', is precisely because this is what the final 'object' remains - texts. The strategic reason why his transformation of the notion of the text continues to go under that name is because, above all, Derrida is critically addressing the institutionalisation of certain systems of reading, writing, and interpretation which determine understandings of texts and of how to analyse them. The reinscription of the sense of text as woven, as a *texture*, is not meant to replace the conventional sense, but to *supplement* it. One should read Derrida's writing on texts and textuality as a form of what he calls "anagrammatic writing" (1981a:98). This refers to the way in which, by virtue of a necessary citational play that inheres in writing, there are relations interwoven between different senses of the same word used on different occasions. This is the source of the undecidability that deconstruction alights upon. Words carry more than one meaning, and this can be used to destabilise and disrupt received interpretations, which are arrived at only by suppressing this plurality. *Undecidability* is not *indeterminacy*. It rests not on making words mean anything at all, but on paying attention to the structured, supplementary play between different possible senses: "Undecidability is always a determinate oscillation between possibilities." (Derrida, 1988:148). These possibilities are determined by 'relations of force'. Play is not indeterminate, and undecidability is not a warrant for freedom of

interpretation, which would involve a blindness to the structured possibilities of meaning that enables words to drift. Derrida exploits the contradictory semantic potential of words (which is the source of their citability) such as *writing*, *text*, *pharmakon*, and *supplement*. These necessarily citational relations, which make of a word an ‘anagram’ of its different senses, must not be reduced or neutralised, because they represent the ‘very textuality of the text’ (1981a:98). Derrida’s ‘text’ is just such an anagram, constantly and productively crossing between the conventional and innovative senses. His is a writing that makes use of words that slide, and also make the discourses from which they are taken slide (Derrida, 1978b:262-270). The ‘same’ words are used, but their effect is altered. To miss this effect of sliding, the exploitation of citational play, would be, as Derrida says of the same effect in Bataille’s writing (267), “*not to read it.*”

This movement and play is crucial to Derrida’s purpose in reinscribing textuality. He is above all else a reader/writer of and on philosophical texts, and his work attempts to grasp the very textuality of texts and trace out its consequences for philosophical discourse. The comment concerning there being ‘nothing outside the text’ comes in the section of *Of Grammatology* in which are set out the ‘methodological protocols’ for reading empirical texts that follow from the deconstruction and the reinscription of classical understandings of text and writing (Derrida, 1976:157-164). Here, the crossing between senses, the citational play, is seen to be addressed to an institutionally specific set of problems to do with reading and writing what we normally recognise as ‘texts’.

The retention of the old name for the new, generalised concept is essential to the *strategic intervention* that deconstruction makes in certain fields. The same operation is at work in the continued use of ‘text’ as in the use of ‘writing’ (1982:329-30). Deconstruction does not supplant one set of concepts with a completely new set; rather it “liberates” those characteristics of a concept that can be generalised beyond its restricted scope, but which are normally kept in check and subordinated.⁵ This generalisation produces a new *supplementary* concept. The aim is to demonstrate the systematic relations between concepts that are often subjected to a rigorous separation, and to open up to question structures of institutionalisation which stabilise the finally irreducible drift of writing. This is part of the double operation of *reversing* and *displacing* the terms of established conceptual oppositions (e.g. text/context, inside/outside, speech/writing) that characterises deconstruction, a double gesture that retains the terms of that structure which it works upon and against because in so doing it retains the power of intervention in that same field (1982:330). Thus, concepts such as ‘text’ and ‘writing’ are not rejected “[s]ince these concepts are indispensable for unsettling the heritage to which they belong, we should be even less prone to renounce them.” (1976:14). Rather, the new generalised concept retains the old name because it works upon the old structure, by means of the citational crossing between

⁵ Derrida (1981b:71) describes this process as the practice of *paleonomy*, a practice that strategically retains an old name to establish a new concept, and describes the practice thus: “Taking into account that a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept, but rather a system of predicates defining a concept, a conceptual structure *centered* on a particular predicate, we proceed: (1) to the extraction of a reduced predicative trait that is held in reserve, limited in a given conceptual structure (limited for motivations and relations of force to be analysed), *named X*; (2) to the delimitation, the grafting and regulated extension of the extracted predicate, the name *X* being maintained as a kind of *lever of intervention*, in order to maintain a grasp on the previous organisation, which is to be transformed effectively.”

senses that enables the generalisation in the first place. The new, supplementary concept of 'text' works in the same way as the generalised 'writing', which Derrida continues "to call writing because it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing." (56). Deconstruction produces new understandings by exploiting the potential for disruption in old conceptual systems, and in thus borrowing the resources of the same field which it deconstructs, it "finds its very foothold there." (314). Appreciating this strategic aim to intervene in fields where textuality, reading, and writing are pressing issues, even if often unrecognised as such, reveals why these accounts of textuality are of relevance here.

Deconstruction is not just about shifting the established notion of text beyond the realms normally reserved for it. The production of a *new* meaning of text is essential to this generalisation and is what marks it out as distinctive. It is also what is most commonly overlooked in accounts of Derrida's notion of textuality. Deconstruction does not consist primarily in making propositions about the language-like quality of things normally understood as non-linguistic, a form of generalisation that tends to take it as given that we already have an adequate grasp of the workings of language, signification, etc. Rather, it asks the more demanding question of what language in all its complexity actually consists of. It is an enterprise that sets out to establish the very conditions of possibility of textuality, writing, language, and of the institutions founded upon particular understandings of each of these.

The argument in favour of viewing the world as if it were a text continues to adhere to an original and proper meaning to the term 'text'. To

understand social, economic, and political processes as texts to be interpreted, on the model that the world is like a text, represents a generalisation of a conventional notion of text as an intelligible object available for certain hermeneutic procedures to what is conventionally understood to be its outside. Even an understanding of texts as radical and innovative as that established by structuralism and semiotics continues to determine the text as an idealised totality (Gasché, 1986:279). This is the 'proper' sense of text which is then generalised to other objects. This form of metaphorical generalisation continues to delimit the text as a totality, with conventional inside and outside divisions remaining unchallenged.⁶ Metaphor and analogy work by establishing conformities and identities between realms and thus reducing their specificity and alterity. The account of citational play upon which Derrida's generalisation is founded is better understood as a metonymic effect, *displacing and combining contiguous meanings* rather than metaphorically substituting figurative for literal meanings.

Derrida's generalisation of the text problematises the construction of insides and outsides, and rests on a critique of the determination of texts as intelligible signifying objects. The weaving of textuality renders problematic the notion of texts as closed entities. If there is nothing outside the text, then neither is there anything inside 'it', since textuality, as the operation of weaving, is now the very means by which insides and outsides are established and recognisable. Rather than taking an accepted notion of 'text' as an

⁶ The most influential of this sort of generalisation of the 'text' metaphor is found in the work of Paul Ricoeur (1974, 1981), where the text continues to be considered as an intelligible unity, and an hermeneutical form of interpretation is proposed as the appropriate means of recovering the meaning-full character of social interaction. On the relations between Ricoeur and Derrida, see Lawlor, 1992.

intelligible object, composed of signifiers and signifieds, and generalise it to its conventional outside, a new notion of textuality is produced which displaces the conventional inside/outside opposition that continues to structure the 'world as text' metaphor (Derrida, 1976:27-73).

If textuality is now seen as that which institutes and destabilises the border, then we have indeed moved a long way from the notion of the text as a self-referential artefact which can be comprehended without reference to anything other than itself. The suggestion that Derrida constructs textuality as being about itself and referring only to itself can now be seen to be a caricature. Deconstructive textuality is all about the process of by which all enclosed, totalised, and apparently self-identical objects are always already fractured in their necessary and irreducible relations with other elements:

“If there is no-thing outside the text, this implies, with the transformation of the concept of text in general, that the text is no longer the snug air-tight inside of an interiority or an identity-to-itself [...] but rather a different placement of the effects of opening and closing.” (Derrida, 1981a:35-6).

If the text is not an object, but a woven fabric, a cloth, a web, or a tissue, then any text, by virtue of its very textuality understood in this way, is essentially fissured, non-identical with itself, always already other than itself. Just what this might mean for a practice of historical reading is what we must now turn to.

'The Problem of Context'

The relation of Derrida's discussions of textuality to the issue of context is most clearly evinced in the engagement with ordinary language philosophy and speech act theory (Derrida, 1982:307-330; 1988). This tradition of thought sets out from the work of the later Wittgenstein, for whom the meaning of words and utterances must be understood in relation to the practical context in which they are used.

Derrida's interest in this line of thought takes the form of a deconstructive reading of how context is presented by J. L. Austin as the means by which language use can be appraised by means other than standards of truth and falsity. He finds in Austin's unproblematic privileging of context the sign of a metaphysical residue in the most self-consciously anti-metaphysical tradition of modern philosophy. I want to explore how the problematisation of the "usual concept of context" (Derrida, 1982:310) that is effected by way of this encounter impinges upon the task of reading texts.

Derrida poses a rhetorical question as his starting point:

"Does not the notion of context harbor, behind a certain confusion, very determined philosophical presuppositions?"

(*ibid.*).

In pursuing this suggestion, the "problem of context" is addressed by examining the way in which writing relates to context. In arguing that writing cannot be properly constrained within the limits of its conventional meaning as merely a vehicle for the transmission of a complete meaning-content, Derrida shows how context is never absolutely determinable of meaning. The

model of the communication of a unified meaning that underlies the appeal to context is rendered problematic by the generalisation of writing by which those predicates ascribed to writing in its normal, narrow sense, are shown to belong to all language (317-8).

Austin's project is to show that classical philosophical treatments of language are inadequate, because they tend to determine all language use in descriptive and propositional terms, and therefore liable to assessment according to standards of truth and falsity. He sets out to show that there are a variety of ways of using language that are not of the order of descriptive statements, and not therefore liable to criticism on the basis of truth or falsity. Strictly grammatical or linguistic criteria of assessment are found not to exist for the range of speech acts with which he is concerned: *performative* utterances, in which the saying of something is itself a social act, not just a description of a state of affairs.⁷ It is the circumstances in which such utterances are made, their contexts, that must be established as the precondition for assessing them. Context is thus invoked as the authoritative criteria of judgement and assessment.

Derrida alights upon those moments when Austin excludes from analysis, a certain range of language uses - language used non-seriously, insincerely, jokingly, non-literally, by actors on stage, in poetry, or when it is cited or quoted - which are noted in passing as possibilities that will not be considered. They are *parasitic* (Austin, 1962:22) upon normal and ordinary

⁷ For example, simple utterances of the form of "I promise to...", and acts of the sort achieved by uttering "I name this ship..." See Austin (1970:233-252) for a succinct discussion of performative utterances.

usage, examples of etiolated utterances, hollowed out and made pale by being taken out of their proper, normal context. This exclusion betrays a normative account of language in which 'parasitic' uses or utterances 'gone wrong' are admitted as possibilities, but only in order to establish the proper means by which to appraise and police language use.

Deconstruction takes place because meaning in language is *not* finally determined by intentionality in the way that Austin envisages. *What we mean*, our intention in using words, may not turn out to be *what they mean*, to be the meaning they take on, in the event of communication. Austin's theory continues to privilege a notion of a subject whose utterances properly belong to it, are its property. But we are not at liberty to make words mean just what we want them to mean, because all language use is dialogical, meant for and dependent on an other, on an interlocutor, and thus involves using signs that are not our property, which must be repeatable, able to be cited, in order to be communicable, and thus must belong to a system beyond the whim of any individual subject. The possibility of repetition sunders the value of presence that continues to be ascribed to speech in conventional accounts of language use. To endeavour to reduce this constitutive function of otherness - which implies the open, non-totalised quality of any utterance - is a political gesture, the sign of an attempt at *mastery*.

Speech act theory breaks with classical philosophies of language by recognising the irreducibly social and communicative essence of all language. However, it determines this sociality as homogenous, unified, and harmonious, in a normalising account which holds that language is a co-

operative form of activity, in which subjects are assumed to work to achieve common shared goals (Pratt, 1986b). In this, it continues to understand utterances independently of the necessary relation to the other *as* other, by determining 'normal' language use as that in which utterances are adequate to the intention of the subject pronouncing them in given circumstances. The value of the self-present subject fully conscious to itself continues to structure Austin's account of performative utterances. Although it is not an ideal thought-content that is being communicated, but rather a force or effect dependent on the act of saying itself, this effect continues to be understood as resting on the conscious presence of an intention to the speaking subject. Austin's philosophy thus rests on an 'ethics of speech' in which the relegation of writing to a secondary and parasitic form is the sign of a conception of a homogenous community of self-conscious and transparent speakers, communicating within the immediate proximity allowed by the range of the voice. It is a conception of linguistic and social authenticity which depends on the denigration of writing as inauthentic, and is founded on the notion of "a community immediately present to itself, without difference, a community of speech where all the members are within earshot." (Derrida, 1976:136). It follows that deconstruction of such conceptions of speech and writing is an ethico-politically charged project. A philosophy of language which denies constitutive difference in fact denies the very possibility of ethics as such:

"There is no ethics without the presence of *the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, *différance*, writing." (139-40).

Derrida's engagement with the speech act tradition calls attention to the politics of the reduction of the constitutive difference and the irreducible and necessary relation to alterity.

We are only able to use language, to intend and to mean, by letting ourselves be used by it. Language is not a tool that we use and control absolutely (Derrida, 1976:158). This understanding effectively decentres the intentional subject and original context from the position of privilege in the determination of meaning and as arbiters of proper usage. A deconstructive reading presupposes that it is possible to identify, provisionally at least, what might have been meant (intended) by a subject, in order to establish the ways and means by which this intention was not realised. However, if it is *possible* to recover the original intention, this is because this very possibility rests on the *impossibility* of being certain that one can always do so: it implies the possibility that the origin has been lost forever (Derrida, 1978a:125). The search for original and full meaning cannot therefore govern, as the first and last principle, the reading of texts, since in principle, by virtue of a text being a text, this origin is inaccessible. Texts must be able to operate in the absolute absence of access to their author's intentions. Discussing the impossibility of pinning down the meaning of a marginal addition to one of Nietzsche's texts ("I have forgotten my umbrella" (1978a:123-143)), Derrida suggests that to suppose that one can recover original context, intention, or meaning absolutely, as the guarantee of one's reading, one must 'forget' that it is a text that is being dealt with. The textuality of texts renders any search for original contexts finally indeterminate.

Writing is conventionally understood as that medium in which meaning is transported, but also as a medium which as such is risky and dangerous, because it works in the absence of the intending subject, who is not in a position to insure proper communication of his/her meaning. Submitting one's thoughts and intentions to writing always entails the risk that they will not be successfully communicated as one intended. The question of writing is proffered in order to demonstrate the limitations of Austin's account of context as a sufficient explanation of language-use, in which the possibility of language use 'going wrong' is the foundation for a normative theory of proper usage, rather than being considered as a structural potential of all language. Austin (1962:61) notes how "written utterances are not tethered to their origin the way spoken ones are." This indicates how speech in his work is considered to belong to its origin, its proper context. Derrida turns the understanding of how writing threatens such a conception back upon the conception of speech and context established by Austin. Writing works by breaking with context as it is understood by speech act theory, which continues to present communication as being founded on the self-presence to itself of an intending subject. The specificities of written communication cannot be fully grasped by speech act theory, and this renders its account of all 'ordinary' language use problematic. Writing is the figure of the irreducibility of the constitutive role of difference in all language. It points towards a different understanding of what is at stake in language, one which rather than producing a normalising 'linguistic utopia' in which both conflict and difference are reduced, identifies how language is always the site where differences are enacted and in which

social relations are negotiated (Pratt, 1987). A 'linguistics of contact', which addresses the politics of language by attending to the concrete ways in which differences are constituted and reproduced, is presupposed as the linguistics of *arche-writing* (cf. Derrida, 1987:253).

Context can never be absolutely determinable, because there exists a "structural non-saturation" of any text by any possible context that one might identify as belonging to it. The insufficiency of any context to fix meaning follows from the way in which writing introduces an essential non-identity into the supposedly identical, self-present principle of intentionality expressed in speech. The use of writing to 'express' an intention or experience involves the use of a medium liable to citational play and sliding, in which the 'original' event is thus irredeemably lost as soon as it is enunciated, unrecoverable in its apparent singular and original plenitude. This is because of the "iterability" of signs, the capacity of written signs or marks to be cited and re-iterated that inheres as the defining feature of written discourse. Iterability is the condition of writing *as* writing, since writing by definition must be repeatable and remain legible even in the event of the disappearance of its author (Derrida, 1982:315). This means that the appeal to original context cannot be used to provide the authoritative protocols by which to read any text, since that text must be able to be legible in the absolute absence of those original circumstances. Its readability is possible because of, and not in spite of, this condition. 'Writing' is just one of the figures that is used to name that movement of repetition by which all presence is established, and which indicates how presence is in fact always riven by absence (Derrida, 1973:54).

Writing is defined, and traditionally vilified, on account of this determining condition of absence by which it operates (Derrida, 1976). Iterability, citationality, repeatability, absence; these are the qualities characteristic of writing which inhabit the structure of all communication, and which introduce non-identity into modes of communication usually understood in terms of the transportation of ideal contents. Writing presupposes the absence of both addressee and addresser as its condition of possibility, and thus is the prime example of the drifting of language which renders impossible any attempt to reconstruct the ideal plenitude of an originating intention, or of any original ground understood as context. Conventionally understood as a mode in which an author confides in us, in fact writing must be able to 'act' even in the absence of the originating subject or access to the intentions of an author (Derrida, 1982:316). It thus renders all contexts finally insufficient as a means of explaining texts.

The problematic of writing is crucial to Derrida's account of textuality *and* its implications for our understanding of the necessary task of contextualisation. Because of the iterable character of all signification, context is always open, non-saturated, and always liable to re-inscription. It is for this reason that:

“there are only contexts, nothing exists outside contexts [...], but also that the limit of the frame or the border of the context always entails a clause of nonclosure. The outside penetrates and thus determines the inside.” (Derrida, 1988:152-3).

The boundaries, frames, and enclosures of contexts are always interrupted by that which exceeds context, which is the necessary iterability and citationality of signs. This notion of writing thus moves beyond a limited conception of the transmission of a pre-existent message, and effects the generalisation of an *arche*-writing which names the originary play of absence, differing, and deferral that produces effects of identity and presence (1976:56-7). Writing necessarily breaks with the context of intersubjective communication between co-present subjects, by virtue of its repeatability. This effect of breaking with context is generalised as a condition of all communication. In this generalised concept of writing there is at work the complex themes of both *differing* and *deferring* that is the condition of all experience, identity, and presence (Derrida, 1982:1-27). This theme of an originary movement of *différance*, addressing as it does the irreducibly temporal and spatial condition of all communication, figures as an insistence on the moment of alterity that inheres in all enclosed totalities and by which they are always liable to dislocation.

Recontextualising Context

The use of 'writing' as the figure with which to challenge preconceptions about contextualisation thus rests on two principles. Writing is, firstly, understood as that mode of language which is able to be legible in the absolute absence of the subject who produced the written sign. Furthermore, it is by token of this condition of absence that "the written sign carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is, the set of presences which organises the moment of its inscription." (Derrida, 1982:317). The possibility of citing, drifting, repeating, grafting, is the condition of *all* signs, as a condition of them being part of a system of language and communication. Writing is conventionally understood as secondary and exterior to the essence of language, as the mechanism that enables the extension over time and space of the communication of consciousness. Writing, thus understood, is the "clothing" (1976:35) given to an ideal, unified thought-content, the sensible material that enables it to be dispersed beyond the immediate presence of the originating subject. For Derrida, this power of dispersal inheres in all language: "That language must traverse space, be obliged to be spaced, is not an accidental trait but the mark of its origin" (232). In demonstrating "the interiority of the principle of writing to language" (313), a modified notion of writing and language arises in which the self-present subject is neither in total control nor the origin of meaning, since all language works only by breaking with the immediacy of conscious intention rendering unrecoverable all putative origin-as-presence.

This does not at all warrant an abandonment of concern with context.

Rather, it points towards a different concern with contextualisation:

“This is the possibility on which I want to insist: the possibility of extraction and citational grafting which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark as written even before and outside every horizon of semiolinguistic communication; as writing, that is, as a possibility of functioning cut off, at a certain point, from its “original” meaning and from its belonging to a saturable and constraining context. Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any centre of absolute anchoring. This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or an anomaly, but is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called “normal” functioning.”

(Derrida, 1982:320-1).

The ‘value of context’ as *a means to appraise and arbitrate* is thus problematised, since an exhaustively determinable and definable context for any utterance cannot be established if, by its very status as utterance, it must

be able to break with context, to be repeated and re-contextualised. The standard appeal made to context relies on the assumption of a relation between texts and other social processes and practices that can be determined once and for all, by means of referring texts to the revealed conditions of production that pertained at the point of their origin. By taking account of the materiality of texts, which is to say their heterogeneous textuality, Derrida contests the essentially idealist presuppositions of the appeal to context as it is conventionally made, whether this is to an originary intention or to a defined set of social or historical conditions. Invoking context to fix the meanings of texts is an idealist move in so far as it presumes that one can reduce their very textuality as inextricably woven textures, and locate within them an ideal moment or centre which is the repository of an identical, immutable and self-present meaning transported without deformation. Derrida draws attention to the shared idealist metaphysics which underwrites both speech act theory and historicist contextualisation. Because texts are material artefacts, linguistic and social through and through, they can be rearticulated and reorganised by other social and material forces into new economies of meaning.

Austin, and before him Wittgenstein, recognised the possibility of language drifting, but interpreted this possibility only in negative terms, as a failure, as language being used improperly and abnormally. The proper use of language is established by exhaustive accounts of language improperly used, but without addressing how the possibility of error inheres in the so-called normal, ordinary case. For Derrida (1982:323), this procedure betrays a quite traditional philosophical attitude:

“It consists in recognising that the possibility of the negative is certainly a structural possibility, that failure is an essential risk in the operations under consideration; and then, with an almost *immediately simultaneous* gesture made in the name of a kind of ideal regulation, an exclusion of this risk as an accidental, exterior one that teaches us nothing about the language phenomenon under consideration.”

Rather than treating exceptions to ‘normal’ language-use by subordinating them to the rule of law, Derrida takes these exceptions as the starting point for a different understanding of the norms and rules by which all language-use works. The risk of being *taken out of context* is not an external trap into which language may fall if it strays beyond its proper bounds. If it is possible for language to ‘fail’, then this must be an internal and positive condition of possibility of successful communication (325). These are things that can happen to all language, as possibilities that reside in all communication:

“if one admits that writing (and the mark in general) *must be able* to function in the absence of the sender, the receiver, the context of production, etc., that implies that this power, this *being able*, this *possibility* is *always* inscribed, hence *necessarily* inscribed *as possibility* in the functioning or the functional structuring of the mark.” (Derrida, 1988:48).

Intention is put in its place, because it is always expressed in a medium which, to enable its communication, must be a material structure of iterability, and given this structure, “the intention which animates utterance will never be

completely present in itself and its content. The iteration which structures it *a priori* introduces an essential dehiscence and demarcation.” (Derrida, 1982:326). Iterability, as the condition of spacing and timing on which any communication rests, means that any analysis of statements will be refocused away from restoring them to their ‘original context as if this were either simple or adequate as an account of that statement. All statements and all utterances, written or otherwise, are such that the “essential absence of intention for the actuality of the statement, this structural unconscious if you will, prohibits every saturation of a context.” (327). For contexts to be exhaustively determinate, it is necessary for intention to be totally present to consciousness and transparent to itself and to others; it must be possible to reduce the essential temporality and spatiality, the movement by which meaning is *conveyed*, to an atemporal and immaterial instant.⁸ But the materiality of language, its essential quality of being able to be repeated and grafted into different contexts, renders this impossible. The condition of possibility of written communication - iterability, repeatability, absence - is also the condition of impossibility for any total, idealised communication or recovery of intention and meaning, since to function as signs, signs must be

⁸ It is here that Wittgenstein’s argument converges most closely with that of Derrida, in insisting on the irreducible sociality of language which renders idealist accounts of meaning inadequate. In the ‘private language’ argument, Wittgenstein shows that there can be no language that would be intelligible to a single subject alone, where meaning would coincide absolutely with itself without the intervention of a mediating, and therefore social, vehicle. The words we use are ones we find ‘ready made’, and this is the condition of their being signs that can communicate meaning. This account, by introducing *essential repetition* as the condition of all language use, breaks with the vision of a self-identical subject communicating silently with itself, by its insistence on the materiality of all experience and communication. Philosophy, for Wittgenstein (1958: 93^e, 261), would reduce the essence and originary ground of signification to the uttering of an “inarticulate sound”. Like Derrida (1973:70-87), he refuses this idealist reduction of materiality, in the form of a silent and instant communion with oneself. On the relations between Wittgenstein and Derrida, see Staten, 1984.

repeatable, that is, detachable from any presumed self-present, identical and singular intention which animated their production.

In Austin's theory, as in historicist contextualisation, *context decides*. It is this value that is being contested by deconstruction. Derrida does not reject the importance of contextualisation, but questions modes of thought that unproblematically prioritise its value as self-sufficient. It is the way that context is invoked as *proper* context, in a normative operation in which originary context acts as the means of appraisal and interpretation, that Derrida calls into question. Intentionality as such is not denied, but a teleological construction of intentionality in which contextualisation is understood as the search for the originary act that can fix, unambiguously, the meaning of utterances or texts is problematised. Such a conception holds that intention can be realised, at least ideally, in a self-identical plenitude. Derrida argues that intentionality is always already non-identical, fissured and divided by its condition of possibility residing in an iterable structure. It does not follow that intention can be forgotten, but rather that it is "inscribed within a system which it no longer dominates" (Derrida, 1976:243).

What follows from this is that a concern for contextualisation no longer refers to the search for a fullness of original meaning. Rather, the pressing question becomes how the essential repeatability of any utterance, the condition of it being used effectively in communication, is actualised: how this *possibility* of being repeated and grafted into a new context is made an *eventuality* in specific contexts (Derrida, 1988:57). Texts cannot be wholly returned to their original context to provide a fullness of meaning, by their

very nature as texts. To construct the issue of context in this way is strictly speaking an ahistorical procedure. One attempts to recover original meanings as a way of arbitrating between various interpretations that could or might be made, as if the text itself provides, in the way it expresses its originary context, its own law of interpretation and the rules by which its meaning should be 'properly' understood. This amounts to an evasion of responsibility for the interpretations and constructions of texts which we make in the present. The appeal to the text's original conditions will not solve the question of how to choose between various interpretations, since this very possibility of conflict resides in and emanates from the fissured texture of texts themselves.

The conventional means of invoking context, in which texts are considered to have proper meanings which inhere in them by virtue of the social or individual conditions determined their production, is unable to address what it is, structurally and historically, which enables texts to be reinterpreted, to be re-contextualised, other than by seeing such grafting as *mis-interpretation*, *mis-understanding*, *mis-use*: as *wrongful confusion* of what is really meant. At the point at which Austin steps back from the full implications of his own demonstrations, refusing to address what must be the conditions of 'normal' or 'ordinary' communication that it may always produce 'infelicitous' results, that an essentially political question arises. There is a consistent policing operation at work in Austin's discussions. Though the possibility of the drifting of meaning is accepted, it is interpreted as an eventuality to be avoided as far as possible and corrected at all costs. This represents a forlorn effort to resist the inevitable effects of writing in

enabling utterances to break from their contexts, and to be grafted into new situations:

“To try to resist the removal of a textual member from its context is to remain protected against this writing poison. It is to want at all costs to maintain the boundary line between the inside and the outside of a context. It is to recognise the legitimacy of the relative specificity of each text, but it is also to believe that any system of writing exists in itself, as a relation of an inside to itself, particularly when it is “true”. This amounts above all to an imposition of fundamentally classical limits upon generalised textuality. It is a kind of discontinuity prompted by resistance and protectionism.” (Derrida, 1981a:316).

This is the resistance marked by speech act theory, and not least in Searle’s (1977) reply to Derrida, which presents an explicitly normalising account of language, and which amounts to a defensive gesture when faced with the more radical potential consequences of reposing those same possibilities differently.

Derrida considers the consequences of deconstruction’s account of textuality and iterability to be a heightened awareness of what contexts, as *limitless* potential for texts to be rearticulated anew, are:

“One of the definitions of what is called deconstruction would be the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus

to an incessant movement of recontextualisation. The phrase which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction (“there is nothing outside the text”), means nothing else: there is nothing outside context.” (1988:136).

‘Context’ has been reinscribed into a much more historical problematic, no longer referring to an idealised original source of meaning, but now being focused on taking into account ‘limitless context’. Bennett (1987:69) indicates that the deconstructive questioning of the adequacy of appeals to context is far from being the textualist idealism it is so often characterised as: “To the contrary, the actual and variable functioning of texts in history can only be understood if account is taken of the ways in which such originary relations may be modified through the operation of subsequent determinations - which may retrospectively cancel out, modify or overdetermine those which marked the originating conditions of a text’s production.” The iterability of writing thus calls forth an analysis of the (re-)inscribability of texts. Attention is focused on an examination of the ways in which certain conditions of recontextualisation are always already inscribed in texts and to how these possibilities are concretely realised.

The consistent attempt to control this recontextualisation by appealing to ‘original’ context, as if texts can in this way provide the answer to the question of their own singular and proper meaning, is a metaphysical operation blind to its own political implications. Deconstruction refuses to grant to texts this authority to decide on disputes about ethics, politics, or

interpretation, not least by consistently demonstrating that all texts are woven from heterogeneous fragments, and can only be made to offer a single, 'authoritative' meaning at the cost of reducing this texture. This is not, however, a warrant for an 'anything goes' attitude to interpretation and reading, based on the presumption that one can make a text mean just what one wants. Texts cannot be used to decide because they are *determinably* non-identical and fissured through the specific and specifiable relation between the threads from which they are woven. It is the task of reading to follow closely this texture, to resist the temptation to reduce its heterogeneity, in order to understand its 'system'. If texts cannot be used to authorise and legitimise interpretations, and if context cannot be invoked as a way of deciding singular meanings with which to do so, the implication is that responsibility for interpretations and their effects is thrown squarely upon 'us'. The appeal to either the text or context as neutral arbiter cannot be anything other than an evasion, or more precisely an erasure, of the specific politics and ethics being legitimised by this appeal:

"The reconstitution of a context can never be perfect and irreproachable even though it is a regulative ideal in the ethics of reading, of interpretation, or of discussion. But since this ideal is unattainable, for reasons which are essential [...], the determination, or even the redetermination, the simple recalling of a context is never a gesture that is neutral, innocent, transparent, disinterested." (Derrida, 1988:131).

The important point is “not whether a politics is implied (it always is), but which politics is implied in such a practice of contextualisation.” (136). This question can only be raised and answered from another position, another contextualisation, every bit as politically and ethically determined. Not only the question of *which* context one invokes and recalls, but also the *way* in which this gesture is made, is a sign of a certain stance towards the contemporary significance of the texts being determined by each particular contextualisation. Deconstruction transforms the relation between text and context (the weaving of inside and outside we have already discussed), in such a way so as to direct attention not towards fixing texts and contexts in their original relation so that they might act as neutral tribunals which determine their own interpretation, but rather to attend to the paths, and the politics involved, of the constant recontextualisation that goes on, and to attend to what it is about texts that enables the forms of contextualisation to which they are subject.

Reading Formations and Responsibility

LaCapra, discussing the issue of contextualisation with respect to historiography, suggests there is a tendency to elevate a necessary concern for contextualisation to the point of an *over-contextualisation* that is construed as explanatory, so that an adequate historical interpretation is characterised by a superabundance of information (1989:191). We can identify just such an operation in recent accounts of the need for a contextual approach to the history of geography, which display that “relatively weak theoretical overlay” of ill-defined notions such as power and ideology which serve as “universal solvents” in explanation and analysis which LaCapra sees as characteristic of such rhetoric of contextualisation. Echoing Derrida’s insistence upon the always politicised act through which contexts are chosen, he insists that in historical work the contexts selected as relevant, and the way the relationship between texts and contexts is elaborated, is closely articulated with the type of relation and exchange between past and present that is posited in any work. A specific motivation for selection of contexts is always at work, and I think that we might usefully follow LaCapra’s suggestion that this choice of ‘pertinent context’ is both intellectual and socio-political in so far as it is in large part motivated by the “interpretations one is trying to counteract or to reinforce and upon the socio-political possibilities one is attempting to disclose.” (207). The characteristic historicist invocation of original context as the panacea of historical understanding only serves to occlude the interests which determine that certain contexts are considered the ‘proper’ ones. Bennett (1987:76) argues that “readings can only be assessed politically in terms of a calculation

of their consequences in and for the present”, and it is this contemporary focus that follows from the conception of texts as always already exceeding their original context, and consequently able to have effects beyond this moment of production, by carrying ‘within’ them the capacity to be articulated into new contexts. Historicist contextualisation attempts to erase or disseminate its own status as an act rooted in a certain contemporary ideological terrain, and its own stakes in this contested field, by explicitly opposing ‘presentism’ and appealing to the authenticating and legitimising value of original context, thereby erasing the fact that this appeal is an act of determining texts as particular objects and readers as particular types of subjects. In contrast, if meaning is necessarily context-bound but now context is understood as limitless, the task of reading is thrown forward onto the examination of how different reading-formations stabilise a given body of texts in particular ways (Bennett, 1983). If texts inscribe certain meanings, these can be re-articulated and transformed by being written into new signifying contexts. Reading is thus refigured as a practice by which texts can be re-written in new ways, a notion that foregrounds questions of responsibility for the readings proffered, and the task of a critical reading would be to de-stabilise the determinations of the boundaries which fix the relevant contexts for given texts in order to establish new and previously unrecognised significances in texts.

Texts are fissured by contradictory possible significations that they are able to support, and from this arises their continued contemporary effectivity. Unifying the non-identical text is inevitable and necessary, but the act of reconciling the irreducible senses does not reside ‘within’ the text. As Barthes

(1977:148) puts it, “a text’s unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination.” Any unity a text has is the effect of a determined unification enacted upon its irreducible texture of alterity.⁹ Derrida’s constant focus on undecidability, his insistence upon the irreducibility of the heterogeneous tissue, and the way in which his writing performs this affirmation of undecidability, are means of naming this condition of the necessarily positioned, interested, and determined character of all readings. In tracking language down to the point where the singular meaning behind any utterance can no longer be determined, in revealing the undecidability that characterises language use, the issue of responsibility is foregrounded. Deconstruction shows that the criteria by which a decision can be made about the precise meaning or intention animating any utterance turn out to be finally inadequate:

“You can deal with, or rather follow, language up to a certain point where these decisions are no longer possible. Not to mislead or to cause anguish, but because, once this limit is reached, the question of deciding or interpreting remains acutely alive (and therefore, that of responsibility, or of response).” (Derrida, 1985b:110).

Readings are always produced, and thus always contestable:

“Our readings will not be readings of a hermeneutic or exegetic sort, but rather political interventions in the political rewriting of the text and its destination.” (Derrida, 1985d:32).

⁹ This reduction is necessary for any reading. The point is that in making it, responsibility for that reduction lies on the side of the reader. De Man (1974:50) argues that deconstruction does not imply a pluralistic perspective on interpretation, but that on the contrary “all effective readings always lay claim to some degree of totality”, and this is because “[y]ou can only develop the reading if you are to some extent committed to it.” (51).

It is because the destination of any text is not determinable by that text's unrecoverable originating conditions that any act of reading is an interception that gives to it its meaning, and this is always a necessarily political interruption. We must take a "political responsibility" for receiving the messages that we inherit; it is we who are responsible for the readings provided of texts, since our readings intervene to determine their destination and give them a provisional unity (51-2). Texts are internally fissured due to their irreducibly linguistic quality, by virtue of which they presuppose and invite in their very texture the active response of others - a *necessary response* which elicits an *unavoidable responsibility*.

The deconstruction of the conventional notions of text and writing are directed at the issue of the readability of texts. Writing as the communication of an ideal content is the conception which underwrites a whole conception of hermeneutic interpretation as the recovery of a fullness of meaning (Derrida, 1982:311). Any written fragment is understood as the bearer of a message or code, laid down at a specific point, which can be recovered or deciphered by returning that artefact to its original circumstances of production. The deconstructive account of the essential force that writing carries of breaking with this original context renders this form of contextualisation, as a regulative methodological protocol by which to guide the reading of texts, insufficient:

"This allegedly real context includes a certain "present" of the inscription, the presence of the writer to what he has written, the entire environment and horizon of his experience, and

above all the intention, the wanting - to - say - what - he - means, which animates his inscription at a given moment. But the sign possesses the characteristic of being readable even if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor intended to say at the moment he wrote it, i.e. abandoned it to its essential drift.”

(Derrida, 1988:9).

Here, the notion of generalised writing is made the condition of the readability of texts. Language is the means by which ‘original context’ is lost in the process of its circulation, so that texts, as written artefacts, do not carry their origins as a unified whole recoverable within them by a hermeneutic effort. If writing is a supplementary structure (1976:245), then it is born only by “suspending its relation to origin.” (243). The legibility of any text is determined by its re-contextualisation into particular reading-formations.

Reading determined by the conventional sense of writing and communication is conceived as an activity of recovering or decoding a message, which exists as a unified semantic content within a text, which acts as its vehicle. The generalised conception of writing sunders this semantic unity. Texts are no longer the means of transporting a unified content. As texts they necessarily break with the presumed original moment of their production, and so reading is freed from the hermeneutic recovery of meaning. It is from this understanding of textuality and writing that the specific deconstructive mode of reading follows: “Writing is read, and “in the last analysis” does not give rise to a hermeneutic deciphering, to the decoding of a meaning or truth.”

(1982:29). Reading is not the decoding of a message, the uncovering of a hidden signified amongst the weave of signifiers. It is also more than merely the following of the pattern of the given fabric, more than “surveying all the threads at once” (1981a:63). To read, one must risk touching the text, risk “getting a few fingers caught” by *adding a new thread*, an addition which is “nothing other giving to read” (ibid.):

“he who through “methodological prudence”, “norms of objectivity”, or “safeguards of knowledge” would refrain from committing anything of himself, would not read at all.” (64).

Reading, after deconstruction, is neither entirely respectful of the text, nor entirely indifferent to it. Texts are no longer to be approached as objects with sharply defined and stable boundaries between an inside and an outside. And if texts are no longer objects, then reading is no longer something which addresses from the outside a pre-given intelligible inside. Texts are part of a whole network of relations, so the reader is now positioned in a relationship much closer to an exchange partly defined by the text itself. The determination of *how* to approach a text determines *what* it is that is to be approached, what the text *is*. Or, to put it another way, the determination of the means by which to approach a text helps to determine what the text will mean:

“since everything begins in the folds of citation [...], the inside of the text will always have been outside it, in what seems to be serving as the “means” towards the “work”. This “reciprocal contamination of the work and the means” poisons the inside.” (Derrida, 1981a:316).

Reading is therefore partly determined by the “the logic of play” (64) between senses that positions readers, and provides them with ‘a certain liberty’ in making something of what they read. Reading and writing are supplements added to an original, additions which follow from the enabling lack which demands them. One is not authorised to add anything at all, but one must pick up the threads left loose. Reading is, as Barthes (1977:159) put it, carried out *at a loose end*.

If the reader is now woven into the text just as texts acquire layers of significance from being woven in and out of other realms and practices, then any given body of texts may be productively approached with the aim of identifying how readers are positioned by them. To elaborate on such an approach to the work of reading, it is necessary to consider the genealogy of ‘discourse’, the notion through which questions of subjectivity, language, and knowledge have been critically addressed in recent social and cultural theory.

4

READING 'DISCOURSE'

An Occasion for Reading

Treating the production of knowledge as 'discourse' requires that the history of knowledge is recognised not as a series of different ways on dealing with the same reality, but as the history of different structures of rationality which distribute objects and subjects of knowledge and establish particular standards of evaluation. Objects of knowledge are not encountered ready-made, but are worked up through considerable technical, experimental, and theoretical labour. The production of knowledge does not, therefore, take place in a pure realm of disembodied reason, but in the public space of scientific institutions, publications, and colloquia.

The knowledge produced by the Royal Geographical Society in the nineteenth century is best characterised, in Foucault's terms (1972:186-9), as emerging at the 'threshold of positivity'. This is the level at which objects which may or may not subsequently be taken up and subjected to the formalised procedures of scientific practices are constituted. Lying somewhere between mere opinion and scientific understanding, the human and social sciences inhabit a space of knowledge which is organised by certain epistemological regularities, but which is not reducible to the methods of analysis developed in relation to the natural sciences. Theoretical and

methodological considerations of *discourse* are therefore appropriate to the analysis of a range of knowledge practices whose objects only have existence through the ways and means in which they are spoken and written about. Foucault proposes an approach that treats the production of knowledge as itself a practice, and his approach to the analysis of such practices attends to “the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse.” (47). His concern is with analysing in what ways, and to what effect, the construction of objects of knowledge determines and depends upon the modes of subjectivity which it is necessary to adopt for them to be known. Rather than asking what a discourse reveals about its objects, attention is redirected to the question of why different discourses exist, who speaks, which institutions support them, and what effects such practices have.

Such an approach raises the question of what happens in practices in which the subject of knowledge is capable of taking the nature of its own existence as the object of analysis. This requires the *institution* of a mode of exclusion by which human social life can be apprehended as an object of knowledge. This is a double exclusion: of what is not considered knowledge; and of those who are not capable of acting as the subjects of knowledge. The aim of analysing such instituted exclusions is to establish what connections exist amongst practices of distinguishing between “true and false” and ways of “governing oneself and others.” (1991a:82). The mode of ‘presencing’ of objects of knowledge constitutes the unconscious of knowledge. It is at this level that the normativity of knowledge production is established, and at which a certain economy of objects and questions is determined. And in so far

as the concept of discourse as it now circulates in social and cultural theory is worked up in relation to this field of organised exclusions and inclusions by which different knowledge-formations operate, we can follow Said (1974:35-36) in describing discourse as “the organised social ethic of language.” The task of approaching knowledge as discourse must therefore be to lay bare the precise dimensions of the inclusions and exclusions which characterise any given knowledge-formation’s ethical foundation.

Latour observes that all forms of knowledge are defined in part by specific ‘practices of exegesis’: “Tell me how you comment on a scripture or an inscription and I will tell you what sort of epistemology you hold on to.” (1987:86). Inverting this proposition, we are led to suppose that an approach which locates the question of otherness and constitutive difference at the heart of its analysis of the production of knowledge, calls for explicit consideration of the question of reading. Foucault’s programme for the analysis of discursive practices was animated by a concern to develop a mode of interpretation that is “no longer afraid to conceive of the Other in the time of our own thought.” (1972:12). Discourse is language understood in relation to its irreducible dependence on difference as the very principle of sociality. Despite Foucault’s (1979b:27) denunciation of deconstruction for the “textualisation of discursive practices”, with the implication that archaeology or genealogy involve something more than ‘mere reading’, I want to trace here the emergence of the concept of discourse as deployed in post-structuralism in order to bring into focus the ways in which it does indeed imply certain specifiable protocols of reading.

Discourse and Subjectivity

'Discourse' refers to "the actual uses of language between particular human subjects for the production of specific effects." (Eagleton, 1991:9). It directs attention to the question of who is saying what and in what circumstances, and thus answers the requirement to situate understandings of language at the level of actual use. Saussure's (1959) linguistics rests upon a series of foundational methodological dualisms, which isolate the object of study (*langue*) as the formal system of differentially related signs. This is the systematic and social dimension of language, in contrast to speech (*parole*), which is taken to consist of the individual and particular use of the resources of *langue*. The distinction between *langue* and *parole* is a distinction between the intelligible system of forms, and the actual concrete realisation of particular utterances made possible by this system. Speech acts are thus constructed as contingent and as wholly individual events. Saussure's linguistics turns around the paradox whereby he identifies speech as the essential locus of language, where it is learned and transformed, while at the same time locating the structural qualities of language in an ideal system. The "epistemological unconscious of structuralism" (Bourdieu, 1990:30) is revealed in this distinction between linguistic system and linguistic use, whereby the sensible aspect is subordinated to the authority of an ideal, intelligible object "of which there is no sense experience" (ibid.). The essentially Cartesian distinction between *langue* and *parole* marks the continued adherence to classical philosophical oppositions - necessity and

contingency, thought and expression, intelligible and sensible - wherein the latter term is consistently subordinated and derived from the former, as its effect and remainder.

Post-Saussurian linguistics endeavours to deal theoretically with language as it actually exists: as *communication*. This involves refocusing attention upon the activities of the speaking subject, and the concept of 'discourse' first emerges from this effort. Jakobson's (1971a) discussion of *shifters* is crucial to the understanding of how the subject is instantiated in language, and thus to the genealogy of 'discourse'. Shifters are a particular class of grammatical units, such as indicators of person and tense, whose meaning cannot be defined without reference to the *message* sent by one speaker to another (130-1). They cannot be analysed as units of the linguistic *code* alone. In such linguistic units as personal pronouns, "code and message overlap" (132).¹ Jakobson's account of shifters is indebted to Peirce's (1932) tripartite conception of the sign. Shifters combine the function of a *symbol*, conventionally representing a given object, and an *index*, a sign that "is in existential relation with the object it represents." (Jakobson, 1971a:132).

Primary amongst these 'indexical symbols' are personal pronouns:

"I means the person uttering *I*. Thus, on the one hand, the sign *I*
cannot represent its object without being associated with the

¹ The distinction between code and message is similar but not identical to that between *langue* and *parole*. Jakobson's theory of linguistic communication is based upon the notion of an addresser exchanging a message with an addressee, by means of a code common to both (1981). The code is a conduit along which information passes. Jakobson (1971b:241) characterises the 'optimum' functioning of communication in the following manner: "the speaker and listener have at their disposal the same 'filing cabinet of prefabricated representations': the addresser of a verbal message selects one of the 'preconceived possibilities' and the addressee is supposed to make an identical choice from the same assembly of 'possibilities already foreseen and provided for'. Thus the efficiency of a speech event demands the use of a common code by its participants."

latter “by a conventional rule”, and in different codes the same meaning is assigned to different sequences, such as *I, ego, ich, ja* etc: consequently *I* is a symbol. On the other hand, the sign *I* cannot represent its object without “being in existential relation” with this object: the word *I* designating the utterer is existentially related to his utterances, and hence functions as an index.” (ibid.).

Shifters are signs of the act of conventionally positing oneself as subject of one’s own utterances. They are the means by which a relation between the act of verbal communication and the ‘content’ of that communication is marked within that ‘content’.

Jakobson distinguishes different components of any given communication event: the speech event; the narrated event; a participant in the narrated event; and a participant in the speech event (addresser or addressee). More generally, he distinguishes “*procès de l’ énoncé*” and “*procès de l’ énonciation*” (134), the distinction between the activity of producing an utterance (enunciation) and the actual utterance itself (statement/utterance). Shifters are the categories within a given utterance by which reference is made in the utterance to the speech event, to the enunciation. The categories of person characterise “the participants of the narrated event with reference to the participants of the speech event”. (134), while the categories of tense characterise “the narrated event with reference to the speech event” (135). We could say that shifters designate the particular relation that exists between the story and its telling.

Benveniste (1971) further develops the notion of shifters into an understanding of language as discourse. Discourse refers to any situation in which utterances have a speaker and a hearer, with the former having the intention of affecting some response in the latter: “discourse is language put into action, necessarily between partners.” (223). He distinguishes between two different tense systems, or planes of utterance. *Discourse* is the personal use of language in which tense is related to the moment of speech, and is exemplified by the present tense of verb forms. *Historical utterances*, by contrast, are characterised by a tense system related to the moment of the narrated event. They do not make use of the apparatus of discourse, which consists of the linguistic means of relating to the person (206-7). The two modes of utterance are thus distinguished by whether or not the speaker is present in the utterance made.

Benveniste’s (217-22) account of personal pronouns is particularly important to his understanding of discourse. These have the peculiar character of being ‘empty signs’: signifiers such as *I* and *you*, *then* and *now*, are structurally necessary parts of the linguistic system, but they have no correspondent signified (there is no concept *I*), therefore they do not have meaning in the way described by Saussure. They belong to the order of speech (219), and are only ‘filled’ and take on meaning in concrete instances of discourse when their function is assumed by a speaker. Their particular function is to enable the same system of language to be used for myriad unique acts of individual expression. The appearance of *I* or *you* in an utterance is referential in a very specific sense:

“What then is the reality to which *I* or *you* refers? It is solely a “reality of discourse” and this is a very strange thing. *I* cannot be defined except in terms of locution [...] *I* signifies “the person who is uttering the present instance of discourse containing *I*.” (218).

These are signs of deictic reference which contain in their operation a reference to the act of uttering. These empty forms are appropriated by a speaker in order to define itself as an *I* and in so doing to define another person as a *you* (226-7). Discourse is thus the very site in which subjectivity and identity are constituted (223-30). If personal identity is necessarily relational, if “[c]onsciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast” (224), then it follows that subjectivity is dependent upon language, because it is only in language that one can posit oneself as the subject of one’s own words and actions, simultaneously differentiating oneself from another person: “*I* posits another person.” (Benveniste, 1971:225).

For Benveniste, this constitution of subjectivity in language occurs in the moment when a speaker appropriates the empty sign, *I*, to itself: ‘Man’ constitutes himself through language. The subject can only be constituted as such by being referred to as *I*, and it turns out that this is an act of self-reference. Benveniste considers the use of personal pronouns and specific tenses to be the signs of the personal and individual act of appropriation by which an utterance is produced in the mode of discourse. Thus, for all its originality, Benveniste’s formulation remains trapped within the problematic bequeathed by Saussure, marked by the dependence on a self-identical and

self-constituting subject. If subjectivity is the result of self-positing through the appropriation of certain linguistic categories, then this presupposes the existence of a pre-linguistic consciousness which can effect such an act. Benveniste therefore theorises the constitution of subjectivity in language in the form of what Pêcheux (1982:17) calls the ‘The Munchausen Effect’: the subject is constituted by an operation equivalent to lifting oneself up by pulling on one’s own hair. Thus, empty signs are filled by a pre-linguistic intention to define oneself as a subject.

For Saussure, the social side of language was its system. Volosinov (1973:60) considers this to have been his ‘main thesis’: “language stands in opposition to utterance in the same way as does that which is social to that which is individual.” The social side is understood as a realm of constraint upon an otherwise essentially free individuality. The delimitation of speech as the accomplishment of a spontaneously creative subject continues to underwrite the linguistics of both Benveniste and Jakobson. Discourse is set in motion by the founding act of appropriation by which a speaker posits himself as an *I*, an act which also posits an other as a *you*: “It is in the instance of discourse in which *I* designates the speaker that the speaker proclaims himself as the ‘subject’.” (226). Otherness, as the very condition of the social, is on this account the product of the originary act of an already constituted consciousness able to say *I*. Such theories of enunciation continue to privilege speech as the conscious synthesising act by which a speaker realises an intention by appropriating the system to its own ends (Pêcheux, 1982:39). This consciousness remains the support for the statement made and any effects

it has. Benveniste's theory of discourse thus remains beholden to a conception of a transcendental ego (Kristeva, 1984:23). While only able to appear as such in language, by referring to itself as *I*, this remains an act carried out by a pre-existing subject that is the synthesising unity behind the use of language (237). Such a conception of discourse as an act of an already coherently-centred subject reproduces the dualism between a realm of necessity on the one hand (*langue*), and a realm of freedom outside the system (*parole*), from which a transcendent subject operates to make infinite use of the finite means of the system.

This continued adherence to a transcendent subject is the outcome of the unresolved tensions of Saussure's programme:

“Transcendancy was implicit in Saussure's linguistics, and those disciplines which drew their influence from it, as the result of understanding the individual simply as a ‘user’ of the social code. The structure of language (*langue*) is mobilised in the individual speech act (*parole*). In this way, the productivity of meaning from a system of differences is abandoned, and meaning can only be understood as what the individual ‘intends’. It is therefore the individual's intention which produces the specific relations of difference.” (Coward and Ellis, 1977:5).

The reinsertion of the question of the subject in language is bought at the cost of reducing the emphasis on constitutive difference as the condition of meaning and experience, by reimposing the notion of a unified ego able to

appropriate the system of differences in the act of speaking. The meaning of the 'empty' signs characteristic of discourse is not constituted *differentially* like other signs. Rather, their meaning is constituted through an act of *identification*. This is the limitation of any "linguistics of *parole*" (Pêcheux, 1982:6): meaning in discourse is understood in terms of identity, and the stress on difference as constitutive of identity is forgotten by positing subjectivity as an achievement of self-apprehension.

The question of just how to understand the posit(ion)ing of the subject in language is one of the points at which post-structuralism departs from structuralism. Benveniste himself asserts the dependence of all language upon subjectivity, such that the relation between language and subjectivity is mutually constitutive: "Language is only possible because each speaker sets himself up as a subject by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse." (1971, 225). Yet the sharp separation between discourse and historical utterances is presented in a way that suggests that, in fact, subjectivity belongs properly only to one mode of utterance. The distinction is between a subjective mode in which the speaker is present in the utterance, and a mode defined by the absence of the speaker, by the fact that the speaker is not explicitly implicated in what is said. Historical utterances are therefore defined as non-subjective (81), since they are deprived of those categories that indicate an intervention of the speaker in what is said, thus contradicting the assertion made elsewhere that all language is inseparable from subjectivity. The absence of these traces of self-positing is taken to be enough to show that historical utterances involve no operations positing subjects at all.

If historical narration, or descriptive language in general, is to be understood as discourse, as a mode of utterance that does involve operations of subjective positing, then it is only on condition that subjectivity be rethought in terms other than self-constitution by a transcendental ego. This is the task undertaken by Barthes' (1989:127-40) account of the 'discourse of history', which identifies the ways in which historical utterances do implicate subjects while appearing not to do so. This is discourse defined by the "systematic absence of any sign referring to the sender of the historical utterance: history seems to *tell itself*." (131). We should stress that this absence is systematic: it implies the operation of practices that determine whether uses of language are produced in the subject-form or not. As Barthes suggests, a subject does subsist in historical discourse, but it is constructed as an 'objective' subject. This is part of the 'referential illusion' or 'reality effect' (141-8), whereby the conflation of the signifier and referent produces the appearance of the autonomous existence of an object or event that is reported in discourse. The erasure of signs of enunciation has the effect of suggesting that the description provided would be identical for any similarly placed individual, and that the appearance of an object made present in a discourse is not dependent on that discourse. It is the condition of the force of the "this happened" (139) which historical discourse secures. Marin (1977:56) explains this effect with respect to the reduction of verbs to the third person form: "when verbs are reduced to the third person, there is no longer, in the utterance, a marker of [the] subject of enunciation, and for this reason, the representations connected to each other in the sentence by the verb "is" can

ontologically appear as the things themselves they represent, as things ordered as they really are in a rational and universal discourse.” Benveniste (1971:208) hints at this in his reference to historical narration as a form in which “[n]o one speaks here: the events seem to narrate themselves.” Everything hinges on this ‘seem to’; in fact, a subject does narrate historical discourse, but as a condition of being placed within a positional field of subjects and objects, and not on its own initiative.

Similar implications follow from Foucault’s (1977:113-38) analysis of the ways different practices instantiate the author-function in discourse. If Barthes raises the possibility that explicit reference to the subject is not the only form in which subject-effects operate in discourse, then Foucault notes that the presence of such reference, in the form of shifters, need not necessarily be considered as a reference to an act by which speakers appropriate language to themselves. In fiction, for example, the appearance of *I* is a convention determined by a particular genre of writing, and needs to be understood not as a reference to the actual writer but as the means by which the reader, who did not produce this discourse, might identify in particular ways with the subject of the narrative (129-30). The appearance of *I* in a discourse needs to be referred not to an originating intention, but to practices which determine whether and how an individual can fulfil the functions of such signs, whether they can occupy the position in a given discourse which it offers (138). The generalisation of ‘discourse’ reinscribes the question of subjectivity within a new problematic. In this move, the subject is not abandoned, but it is stripped of its creative role: “It should be reconsidered,

not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies.” (137-8). Furthermore, this reinscription indicates that to dethrone the subject from its place as support of discourse requires that we reconsider the privilege of a certain conception of speech as the model of discourse. Foucault’s chosen example indicates that the consideration of the operation of shifters in *written* language displaces the conception of them as modes of self-positing, and opens up a space to consider discourse in general outside of the authority of the values of identity and presence.

Discourse as Practice

There is an ambiguity at the heart of the notion of the subject as a conscious intentionality animating its own actions:

“In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission.” (Althusser, 1971:82).

The ‘freedom’ characteristic of the subject, Althusser suggests, is the effect of a process of being constituted ‘as if’ it were free. ‘Freedom’ to act or to submit to authority is referred to an anterior operation of power, an implication which Foucault (1982:212) identifies as inhering in the “two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.” These considerations direct attention to a notion of the constitution of subjectivity not as the originary act of self-positing, but as a process of *subjectification*.

Althusser theorises ideology in relation to the constitution of subjectivity, and presents interpellation as the process by which individuals are invited to identify their experiences with images and representations of those experiences which are not of their own making. This process takes place in particular material practices by which individuals are solicited to take up positions within a field of representations. Interpellation is the means by

which an individual's imaginary relation to their conditions of existence is secured (Althusser, 1971:127-86). Althusser separates the constitution of subjective identity from an act of self-foundation. Rather than suggesting that subjectivity works by naming oneself as *I*, subjectivity is secured for the individual through interpellation by recognising itself as the addressee of a discourse that it does not 'pronounce'. This assumption of subject-positions is a form of misrecognition, since the individual assumes that it exists as subject independently of the discourse which actually situates it as such.

Silverman's (1983) revision of Benveniste is indebted to subsequent elucidations of Althusser's account of interpellation. She argues that Benveniste's identification of two modes of subjectivity operating in language, a grammatical subject and an actual speaker, remains tied to an essentially conversational model of discourse that continues to privilege spoken dialogue. Thus the *speaking subject*, the actual speaker of an utterance, is also the one who identifies with the subject position offered in the statement, or the *subject of speech*. Silverman suggests this is inadequate for understanding the cinematic apparatus as discourse, and her critique bears more generally upon our task of understanding discourse outside of the privileging of speech. In the case of written texts, as with cinematic discourse, the act of producing statements is separated from the moment of identifying with the subject-positions in the 'enounced' (46-7). The discursive production of subjects works through the operation of three levels of subject-effect (47). The *speaking subject* refers to the agency of discourse, the place from which the discourse is produced; the *subject of speech* is the subject of the statement

produced by this agency; and the *spoken subject* is the subject constituted through identification with the subject of speech. In Althusser's example of being hailed by a policeman (1971:174), it is the policeman who stands in the position of speaking subject, while the individual he summons, in answering to the call, identifies himself as the subject of the statement "Hey, you there", and in this way is produced as the spoken subject of that utterance. The distinction between the 'speaking subject' and the 'spoken subject' marks the move beyond Benveniste's assumption that the subject posited in discourse is the same individual who actually produces the utterance, and is essential for a consideration of discourse that does not privilege speech as a realm of self-present identity.

We are moving away from a notion of discourse as an exchange between speakers in which, in addressing another person, one party defines itself as a subject. The exchange is now considered as occurring between individuals and institutional agencies and practices: various apparatuses of subjectification. It is an institutional agent that addresses the individual, defines that person in the process, and determines the relation between that person and the agency/apparatus itself. It is crucial not to collapse the distance between the production of discourse and the subject interpellated or 'spoken' by with this discourse. The individual only identifies with the *I* positions of the enounced, while the actual production of discourse is not the achievement of the reader, spectator, viewer, etc. This separation of the production of utterances from the operations of identification reasserts and relocates the irreducibly relational and differential basis of subjectivity. Subjectivity is not

referred back to a synthesising act, but to social practices that determine and enable certain subject-functions to be assumed and certain individuals to be recruited to them.

By insisting upon discourse as an institutional modality, not only do we reassert the heterogeneous relationality that underwrites subjectivity, sacrificed by the ‘linguistics of *parole*’ as the cost of reinserting the subject into theories of language, but we are forced to re-evaluate the notion of language being a medium of communication. If discourse refers to material practices by which both speakers and listeners are set in place, then it follows that any instance of communication is determined by non-communication, the theme which underwrites the theorisations of discourse in the work of Foucault and Pêcheux.

Althusser (1971:172) argued that interpellation is the mode in which subjects are provided with identities and speaking positions that secure “obviousnesses as obviousnesses”. It is this theme that Pêcheux pursues, developing a notion of discourse as the social production of the obviousness of subjects and objects in the world. He asks how it is that we come to think of the function of words being to communicate meaning, and of language resting on the division between persons and things, subjects and objects. The authorisation of these assumptions, in the form of semantic considerations of language, is the mark of a resistance to theorising language as a fully social institution. Pêcheux endeavours to develop an account of the production of ‘obviousnesses’ and of ‘evident propositions’ which does not take for granted either the function of a subject or the existence of a given field of objects.

Frege's distinction between sense and reference (1980:56-78), where sense is the mode of presentation of any assertion of reference to an object world, suggests that meaning is not a matter of merely matching up words with objects. Rather sense precedes reference, it provides the truth-conditions which determine how the meaning of any utterance should be analytically approached. Not all statements demand treatment in relation to their truth value (63). Pêcheux turns to Frege because of his account of the way certain aspects of language lead to the presupposition of a real object to which a statement refers. This capacity of language to predicate meaning is central to Pêcheux's account of ideological discourse. Discourse analysis will indicate how statements instantiate and depend upon unstated knowledge and assumptions which provide their coherence.

Pêcheux identifies two mechanisms of discourse which operate to produce the evidentness of objects and the obviousness of the subject in language. 'Pre-construction' is the means by which objects are identified in discourse as if they have prior existence, autonomous of their being spoken about. Preconstruction is therefore the mechanism of *embedding* by which objects appear in discourse in as if they are always already there (1982:74). It imposes and secures reality and its meaning, securing the obviousness of a world of things (115). The second mechanism is the 'sustaining effect' (73), which is the means by which discourse turns back upon itself, and restates what has already been said. It involves, for example, simple statements of the form "as I have said", "as everyone knows", "as everyone can see". This *articulation of utterances* constitutes the subject in relation to meaning,

producing the sense of a full, coherent subjectivity across the run of language. The sustaining effect acts as a 'lateral reminder' (84) of something already known or said.

These two mechanisms represent a 'double form of subjection' (121), by which the evidentness of an object world and the security of coherent subjectivity is constituted. The preconstructed imposes what 'everyone knows' as beyond question; articulation secures this with respect to each individual subject. These discursive operations are the means by which subjectivity is constructed and confirmed in relation to a field of objectivity. The subject, as the origin, centre, and cause of itself and its actions is structurally related to the evidentness of meaning, to the notion that words and statements name and refer to things: "The reproduction of meaning is an integral part of the interpellation of the individual as subject." (187).

The practices that bring into play the positions from which words are used and in relation to which they take on meaning consist of what Pêcheux calls 'discursive formations' (111). Words do not take on meaning in relation to some ostensible referent, but in relation to the discursive position occupied by those who utter them: "words, expressions, propositions etc, obtain their meaning from the discursive formation in which they are produced." (ibid.). Pêcheux directs our attention to the regularities which determine how words are used, the system of substitutions and differences in which words take on meaning and subject-positions are offered from which it is possible to be the agents of those meanings:

“if the same word, the same expression, and the same proposition can have different meanings - all equally ‘evident’ - depending on which discursive formation they are referred to, it is because, I repeat, a word, expression or proposition does not have a meaning ‘*of its own*’ attached to it in its literalness; its meaning is constituted in each discursive formation, in the relationships into which one word, expression or proposition enters with words, expressions or propositions of the same discursive formation. Correlatively, if it is admitted that the *same* words, expressions or propositions change their meanings as they pass from one discursive formation to another, it must also be admitted that words, expressions or propositions which are *different literally* can, in a given discursive formation, ‘have the same meaning’, which if you follow me, is in fact the condition for each element (word, expression or proposition) having a meaning at all.” (112).

The meanings of words is an effect of the material practices that enable them to be produced and circulated. Discursive formations stabilise and “produce the subject and simultaneously *along with him* what he is given to see, understand, do, fear, hope, etc.” (112-3). In them, the identity of subjects is secured by providing them with their reality, by constituting language as an arena of transparent meaning. Words, meanings, and expressions change their sense depending on the positions from which they are articulated, and this indicates that language is itself a terrain of social struggle - struggle over the

sense, expression and meanings of utterances - and it is this essentially conflict ridden existence of language which is occluded by attempts to construct universal semantic systems (Pêcheux, 1978:266).

In contrast to Althusser's account of ideology, in which language remains the medium through which social relations are reflected in ideological apparatuses, Pêcheux's account of discursive formations draws attention to the irreducible materiality of language as a site where differences are articulated (cf. Pêcheux and Fuchs, 1982). This specific attention to language also distinguishes it from Foucault's work, where discursive practices are provided with a more general institutional inflection. Nonetheless, his approach dovetails neatly with Pêcheux's in its focus upon discourse as productive of fields of subjects and objects of social practice. Foucault's archaeological method sets out to grasp the production of statements in their specificity and to determine their conditions of emergence (Foucault, 1972:28). He suggests that statements are produced in relation to particular 'enunciative modalities' (50-2), a conjunction of terms that marks a refusal to consider enunciation as an act supported by a founding subject. 'Enunciative modalities' are embedded within discursive practices, which are "characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, a definition of a legitimate perspective for the agents of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories." (1977:199). Foucault is concerned with making visible the relation between things and words: "in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice."

(1972:49). Discourse is not considered as the place where words are used to designate things, an understanding that enables the “elision of the reality of discourse”, an elision supported by and which supports in turn the continuing privileging of a founding subject or originary experience (227). Instead, discourses are treated as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.” (49). This ordering of objects also involves the positioning of subjects: discursive practices consist of specific relations to a field of objects and prescribe a definite position to any possible subject (107).

Not only does Foucault assert that the subject does not stand outside of discourse as its support but is instantiated by discourse, he also affirms that discursive practices are arenas which regulate and limit the production of statements. The production of discourse, what is said, is determined by a ‘law of rarity’ (118-9). This leads inevitably to the examination of the play of power peculiar to discourse and of the rules of exclusion and principles of regulation that form discourses. Power is not at work in discourse from the outside, as an impostor in a properly autonomous realm of creativity. Rather, discourses are constituted by the combination of principles of ordering and exclusion with a power of affirmation. Analysing discourse is the means of establishing the lineaments of this constitutive relation, of apprehending discourse as the “action of imposed rarity, with a fundamental power of affirmation. Rarity and affirmation; rarity, in the last resort, of affirmation.” (234). Meaning and communication are founded by exclusion, a dependence that leaves its traces upon what is articulated in different discourses.

A discursive practice is therefore formed by a “play of prescriptions that designates its exclusions and choices.” (Foucault, 1977:199). The category of *practice* indicates that the production of discourse is not being referred to the intentional acts of a creative consciousness, but is analysed rather as the condition of any subject-effect. Lecourt (1975:196) considers discursive practice a “basically materialist theoretical innovation” and clarifies the significance of ‘practice’:

“the word practice does not imply the activity of a subject, it designates the objective and material existence of certain rules to which the subject is subject once it takes part in ‘discourse’.

The effect of this subjection of the subject are analysed under the heading: ‘positions of the subject’.” (196).

It is in this sense that discourses are considered as so many ‘practices of subjection’ (Foucault, 1982): material practices of language production which shape fields of subjects and objects of knowledge, morality, sexuality, discipline, etc. Deleuze (1988:9) specifies what treating discourse as a practice implies for analysis: “statements refer back to an institutional milieu which is necessary for the formation both of the objects which arise in such examples of the statement and of the subject who speaks from this position.” Foucault seeks to recover the ‘density’ of practices whose effectivity lies in producing, circulating, and manipulating language. If “to speak is to do something” (Foucault, 1991b:126), what is required is a mode of analysis, a strategy of reading, that is adequate to the task of locating what sort of thing is done in saying things, and just what sort event the production of discourse is.

Displacing the subject from centrality by theorising discursive practices as modes of limiting what can be said implies a particular attitude to the question of interpretation, which becomes clear in Foucault's rejection of 'commentary' as a mode of historical analysis:

"Commentary questions discourse as to what it says and intends to say; it tries to uncover that deeper meaning of speech that enables it to achieve an identity with itself, supposedly nearer to its essential truth; in other words, in stating what has been said, one has to restate what has never been said."

(Foucault, 1973:xvi).

If discourse is based on the principle that "*everything* is never said" (1972:118), it is not because something is hidden within manifest statements. This hermeneutical assumption rests on a 'strange attitude to language' which assumes an excess of the signified over the signifier, more meaning beyond the actual words than they are able to communicate, and yet an excess of meaning which resides within the signifier which is insufficient as its vehicle (1973:xvi-ii). The recovery through the analysis of the signified of a presumed fullness hidden by the signifier, as a means of rendering the past intelligible, evades the question of what sort of historical event the production of a given statement was in itself, in favour of considering discourse as a sign or trace of other events: it treats discourse in the form of 'documents' (1972:6). 'Commentary' is the operation by which the content of the 'document' is revealed by stripping away the ornament that both harbours and conceals it. Such interpretation considers language in terms of an endless plenitude of

meaning, and thus it occludes the transformation which all reading produces, by claiming to be recovering a remainder which is 'there' already. Interpretation as commentary is a means of evading what constitutes discourse as such, its 'rarity of affirmation': "To interpret is a way of reacting to enunciative poverty, and to compensate for it by the multiplication of meaning; a way of speaking on the basis of that poverty, and yet despite it." (1972:120). Foucault rejects interpretation, hermeneutics, and polysemia in favour of an analysis of statements that "questions them as to their mode of existence" (109): what it means that they came into existence, that they persisted, and that they can be recirculated in certain ways. A structural analysis of discourses approaches them "by supposing no remainder, nothing in excess of what has been said, but only the fact of their historical appearance." (1973:xvii). The task of archaeology is the "intrinsic description of the monument" (1972:7). To treat statements as 'monuments', as "things left by the past" (ibid.), is to escape the paradigm of hidden meaning and apprehend discourse in relation to "the practices and structures which 'carve up' and articulate what is seen and what is said." (1973:xix).

Reading Assignments

If treating statements as products of discursive practices implies being ‘against interpretation’, then just what sort of reading is required? We can start to answer this question by considering the specific principle which structures the archaeological description of statements:

“If a proposition, a sentence, a group of signs can be called ‘statement’, it is not therefore because, one day, someone happened to speak them or put them into some concrete form of writing; it is because *the position of the subject can be assigned*. To describe a formulation qua statement does not consist in analysing the relations between the author and what he says (or wanted to say, or said without having to); but in determining what position can and must be occupied by an individual if he is to be the subject of it.” (Foucault, 1972:95-6 [emphasis added]).

If the enunciative function is analysed in terms of how different practices determine the formulation of objects, concepts, and strategies as well as the formation of subject-positions (40-70), it is nonetheless this task of locating the formation of subject-positions that is the key to approaching discourse. Following Pêcheux, we can see that the interpellation of subjects in discourse is simultaneously the production of meaning, that is, the constitution of a field of objects. It follows that to approach texts in order to establish what attitude to the world is presumed and demanded by them as their very condition of intelligibility is a means of making visible the ‘world-constitutive’ effects they

have and the cultural work they perform. *What* is said is approached with the aim of isolating how, from where and by whom, it could be said, in order to apprehend “how the what is made.” (Spivak, 1988b:243). As Adams and Minson (1978:51) suggest:

“Determining what position can and must be occupied by an individual if it is to be the subject of a statement consists posing questions concerning the *sites, states* and positions of discursive agents with regard to objects.”

This task requires the identification of how texts assign certain positions as the necessary conditions of their formation and subsequent readability. Spivak (1988b:243) indicates how this effort is enabled by the character, as a practice, of discourse itself:

“Foucault asks us to remember that what is reported or told is also reported and told and thus entails a positing of the subject. Furthermore, that anyone dealing with a report or a tale (the material of historiography or literary pedagogy) can and must occupy a certain “I”-slot in these dealing. The particularity of this “I”-slot is a sign. It may for instance signify a socio-political, psycho-sexual, disciplinary-institutional or ethno-economical provenance.”

We are returned here to the suggestion that by identifying the subject-positions in statements, the ‘instances of discourse’ out of which they emerge become accessible, but these are now considered as discursive practices rather than acts of inter-subjective communication. The signs of political commitments

and institutional positions which reading alights upon are not under the control of the person who articulates them. And this reorientation suggests that “the archival or archaeological work of historiography might resemble a certain work of reading which is usually associated with literary interpretation if it is detached from its psychologicistic or characterological orthodoxy.” (Spivak, 1988b:243, cf. 1985:128-32). Such a work of reading endeavours to make visible the positions available for making given statements, by analysing the operation of texts in order to locate the sites of enunciation inscribed in them, and to identify what possible sites are excluded as the condition of their appearance.

Such a strategy of reading, adequate to the task of revealing subject-positions and fields of objectivity in discourse, might be best characterised as a mode of ‘literal’ reading, to distinguish it from a ‘transcendent’ reading that leaps over the materiality of texts to their supposed referents or signified, as well as from an ‘immanent’ reading that refers texts to what animates them from within. But if reading discourse demands a mode of non-metaphorical reading, one that does not assume that there is something else being said under the guise of what is actually said, does this mean that what one could want to say about a text or statement is immediately evident?

Symptomatic reading refuses the ‘empiricist fallacy’, which would have it that the immediately given is all there is to a text, but also the ‘interpretative fallacy’ that is characteristically offered as the alternative. It is the latter that presupposes some hidden, interior reserve of meaning behind the manifest sense, and underlies the operation of reading “which transposes the

work into a commentary, a displacement intended to conjure up the content, unhinged and stripped of the ornament that concealed it.” (Macherey, 1978:75). The multiplicity of meanings that may characterise any text is not unlimited, and interpretation is not unbounded. Any text is produced in specific, determinant and contradictory conditions, and these are marked within it: they determine the principle of diversity structuring any given text and condition its reinscribability into new contexts. This stress on multiplicity as the effect of determinant contradiction is consistent with a conception that texts do not have autonomy and independence, that they are not self-identical entities. Rather, they are constituted by relations of absence, by constitutive differences with other texts and practices:

“To explain the work is to show that, contrary to appearances, it is not independent, but bears in its material substance the imprint of a determinate absence which is also the principle of its identity.”

This notion of the identity of a text being the effect of a constitutive absence is central to the practice of symptomatic reading, which sets out to observe not only the presences and absences in texts, but above all to locate the form in which they are combined, how what is present is structurally related to what is absent. Thus, it is an approach that breaks with the “religious myth of reading” (Althusser and Balibar, 1970:17) and the attendant value ascribed to ‘totality’

by insisting on the irreducible and constitutive effect of contradiction and absence in determining that a given text is what it is.²

The 'unsaid' of any act of communication is something *other* that determines that the 'said' can be uttered: "to analyse an utterance is not to trace its genesis but to illuminate that other thing from which it is produced" (Macherey, 1978:157).³ Reading is not a means of uncovering what is really being said within the text, but proceeds instead on the assumption that "it seems useful and legitimate to ask of every production what it tacitly implies, what it does not say. Either all around or in its wake the explicit requires the implicit: for in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said." (85). Symptomatic reading "divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970:28). In this way, what we are calling a literal reading will make explicit something about a text which the text does not itself contain, and thus transform it (Macherey, 1978:149). Texts do not contain hidden depths, they are instead considered to be "entirely *readable*, visible, entrusted" (99), but this readability is of texts "loquacious with an obstinate silence" (ibid.). Social power appears at the margins of texts in the form of absences, and this is the 'meaning' grasped by symptomatic reading: "this meaning is not buried in its depths, masked or disguised; it is not a question of hunting it down with interpretations. It is not in the work but by its side: on its margins, at the limit here it ceases to be what it claims to be

² This type of reading is prefigured by Spinoza (1951:98-119) in his rejection of 'metaphorical reading' as a prerequisite for dealing with what is actually there in a text, with all its contradictory and unsettling consequences (cf. Montag, 1993).

³ This indicates that this concern with the production of texts is not the same as the effort to recover some original act or event of which the text is the residue. In so far as absence is constitutive of the text, its production is an event that is contingent on the contemporary work of transformative reading.

because it has reached back to the very conditions of its possibility.” (154). We are led to read for marginal silences in order to identify the conditions which determine the absence of certain words and voices which is the principle which supports what is actually said. This requires that reading suspends the sovereignty of the subject to project meaning and harmonise texts, and instead surrender to determination by a text’s own protocols. It is a method akin to the deconstructive approach to reading, which refuses the assumption of the unity of texts, an assumption that underlies conventional exegetical interpretation and defines its specific ‘ethics’ - the presupposition that texts are characterised by an integrity of meaning leads to what is marginal and contradictory being denied or suppressed in the name of unity (de Man, 1989:221). Deconstructive reading follows to the letter what is written, it is “actual reading, productive of its own ethical imperative” (ibid).⁴ It is an approach that implies an essential element of passivity, in so far as it is a reading that follows what has to occur:

“Reading is an argument [...] because it has to go against the grain of what one would want to happen in the name of what has to happen; this is the same as saying that understanding is an epistemological event prior to being an ethical or aesthetic value.” (222).

What occurs in reading is unanticipated, something that is forced upon the reader, and thus something of which they cannot be the source. It is therefore a

⁴ See Miller (1987) and Critchley (1992) for considerations of the ethical dimensions of deconstructive reading.

mode of reading appropriate to a project that sets off from a critique of the subject as the origin and centre of meaning.⁵

Reading as Negotiation

In order to discern the discursive effects of subjection at work in texts, what is required is an approach to reading which closely follows the texture of texts, yet one which is finally able to dissent from the positions offered up. To contemplate such an effort it is necessary to return to the question of agency. According to Althusser's theory of interpellation, the subject is a possible position constructed for individuals in social relations. As Coward and Ellis (1977:71) observe, Althusser presents interpellation as working automatically, and thus "closes off the possibility of the human subject being constructed in contradiction, which should follow from his work elsewhere." If we are to make use of the notion of interpellation of subjects in discourse to inform a practice of critical reading, then we must consider interpellation as a contradictory process. Pêcheux develops the notion of interpellation not as a singular, mechanical operation, but in terms of different modalities of subjective identification involved in identification (1982:156). *Identification* is the process Althusser describes, where individuals are successfully interpellated as subjects. This effect of subjectification can be resisted in the form of *counter-identification*, which involves a "struggle against ideological

⁵ Derrida and de Man do not approach reading in identical fashion. For de Man, reading repeats the structure of texts. Derrida suggests that reading is a strategy applied to texts, and the processes and relations constitutive of meaning that it reveals are produced by reading (1976:158). See Harvey (1990) for a full consideration of this *différance*. It should be noted that the 'end' of the type of reading being discussed here would be something different from the declaration of the 'unreadability' that de Man's work implies.

evidentness on the terrain of that evidentness, an evidentness with a negative sign, reversed in its own terms.” (157). Both identification and counter-identification remain inscribed within the evidentness and obviousness of meaning and subjectivity projected by a given discursive formation. A third mode of identification endeavours to work on and against the dominant practices of subjection and producing evident meaning, and Pêcheux calls this *disidentification*. Disidentification does not reproduce discourse in its identity, but opens it up in new directions. It involves “taking up antagonistic positions which have the force of contradiction to what prevails.” (Macdonell, 1986:126). It is a notion that enables us to consider the problem of agency and of resistance without abandoning the advances made by suggesting that subjectivity and meaning is always produced in determinant practices of interpellation.⁶

Althusser’s folly in theorising interpellation is to conflate the individual and the subject (Smith, 1988:17), in so doing foreclosing the possibility of understanding interpellation as always a contingent process. If we are to understand the subject as always a discursive subject, as always subject to the representations of specific discursive practices, then it follows that subjectification needs to be recognised as an ongoing and contradictory process of multiple interpellation. The possibility of agency and resistance derives from and is demanded by the fact that “interpellation is various” (31;

⁶ In Pêcheux’s early formulation, disidentification was a mode of breaking from practices of ideological subjection by taking a position outside of them in science, understood as a subjectless practice. He subsequently revised this understanding, renouncing the idea of a scientific theory which completely escapes the identificatory effects of subjection as a “theoreticist illusion” (Pêcheux, 1983:32). Disidentification is refashioned as a form of resistance and revolt which takes place within ideology, which is understood as always internally riven and ruptured by contradictions.

cf. de Lauretis, 1987:3-30). At any one time, an individual will be the subject of a number of discourses, of class, race, nation, etc., related to specific material technologies and apparatuses. Agency emerges in the interstices of multiple and contradictory positions. The subject has been put in its place by being de-centred, enabling a consideration of speakers as agents, where agency is understood not in relation to a spontaneity of the will but as a situation where individuals have certain determined capacities for action only by virtue of being “subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise.” (Adams and Minson, 1978:52).

The capacity of any discourse to position or recruit specific subjects is never absolute. Interpellation or discursive positioning is not a deterministic process: “A person is not simply the actor who follows ideological scripts, but is also an agent who reads them in order to insert him/herself into them - or not.” (Smith, 1988:xxxiv-v). Individuals are never ‘subject’ to just one text at a time: interpellation is not an abstract process between a single text and individual, which would lead to the foreclosure of the question of reading by presuming the subject as wholly determined by the text (Morley, 1980:66-7). The effects of positioning in a given discourse is always overdetermined by the preceding history of interpellation and the coeval operation of other discourses, and neither is any single discourse likely to proffer only a single position. A single text is not empowered on its own to force any reader to comply with the effects of meaning and identification that it may have inscribed within it “because what always stands between the text’s potential or preferred effect and an actualised effect is a reader which has a history of

his/her own.” (Smith, 1988:34; cf. Morley, 1980:164). This history consists of complex engagements with other texts, other discursive practices and other social relations. Thus interpellation produces contradiction and not a coherent identity, because “each interpellation has to encounter, accommodate, and be accompanied by a whole history of remembered and colligated subject-positions. Thus it is perfectly possible that interpellation should be resisted - that it should fail, simply.” (Smith, 1988:37). Such an understanding leads us to a notion of reading as one means of ‘negotiating interpellations’ (32), as one path of resisting effects of subjectification by making use of the potential for agency inscribed in the concatenation of heterogeneous subject-positions in overlapping discourses (cf. Davies and Harré, 1990:62).⁷

Volosinov (1973) anticipated these themes by locating the relational constitution of meaning firmly within social relations, arguing that the irreducible and constitutive effects of difference in language derive from the force of social conflicts. The ‘social multiaccentuality’ of the sign is what makes it possible for signs to be used as ‘refracting and distorting mediums’, but it also ensures that this possibility can always be resisted. The same word is used by different, opposing social groups, and thus the sign becomes an arena “for the clash of live social accents” (23). Volosinov argues that the meaning of any word is always determined by the location within the social relations from which it is spoken. This essential mutability of the sign, determined by its being irredeemably social, enables its appropriation, its being made ‘uniaccentual’ by having a single meaning ascribed to it. The

⁷ See Moores, 1990, for a critical overview of the theories of texts, contexts, and reading which inform the discussion here.

assertion of a single, obvious meaning to a word or statement is a mark of force, but there always exists the possibility of resisting this ossification of meaning, by reinscribing that word in the direction of another social orientation. It is this possibility that the practice of reading we are trying to specify sets out to actualise.

This effort to impose a singular meaning in discourse can be fruitfully understood in terms of the ways in which certain preferred positions are woven into statements, texts, etc. Subject positions are inscribed within texts as their conditions of intelligibility, so that texts ‘encourage’, but cannot secure absolutely, certain readings:

“texts privilege a certain reading in part by inscribing certain preferred discursive positions from which its discourse appears ‘natural’, transparently aligned to the ‘real’ and ‘credible’.”

(Morley, 1980:167).

I am suggesting a mode of reading that inhabits these positions in order to bring them to light, one that implies a disidentification with specific discourses, enabled by a position within contradictory processes of interpellation which exploits the possibilities for agency that arise therein. The ways texts prescribe certain positions from which they make sense can be revealed by a mode of literal reading that is characterised by a “readiness to submit to interpellation.” (Mocnik, 1993:144). This yielding to what has to happen marks the dependence of the subject on processes of discursive constitution, by apprehending the practices by which the subject is instantiated by particular texts. And this, as a means of making visible the systems of

exclusions which organise any given discourse, in turn makes possible the identification of the position of “the unintended reader” of a text, the excluded subject-position from which it is possible to say ‘no’ to the protocols of that text (Segal, 1988:17-18).

This chapter has turned upon the conviction that if we are to recognise the “insistence of the other as the law of social space and historical memory, and this as the very principle of the social-historical real” (Pêcheux, 1988:647-8), then it is necessary to establish the outlines of a reading strategy that is consistent with this principle with which to pursue the analysis of the archive in view here. Different modes of reading, in so far as they imply specific treatments of otherness and difference, necessarily involve more than mere methodological perspectives. Only by suspending what one anticipates one will find and refusing the privilege of final interpretative authority, can a reading remain open to the ‘surprise encounter with otherness’ (Johnson, 1987:15). Here, we have traced an approach that endeavours to make the encounter with radical alterity its very principle as the condition for a critical reading which does not presume to be able to free itself from complicity in order to sit in judgement. Rather, by surrendering to a text’s protocols as far as possible, one commits oneself to answer for what is anonymously enacted upon the subject. Responsibility for what one makes of texts in reading is made possible by accepting the irreducible element of passivity upon which that practice depends.

5

MISSIONARIES OF SCIENCE I

Locating Race in Geographical Knowledge

Africa and the Rise of Geography

Addressing the historical penchant for territorial pilfering displayed by his countrymen, J. R. Seeley wrote in 1883 that the British had “conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind.” (1909:10). Before then, he implies, there had been no great conscious effort, either real or imagined, to appropriate, occupy, and govern the territory of other people. Against this sort of understanding, which would limit imperialism to a formal administrative phenomenon of occupation and control dating from the 1870s, Said (1990c:70-1) notes that all those territories which were to become central in the period of high imperialism were already ‘sites of contention’ for at least a century or more before this period. He argues that imperialism needs to be understood as an “act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control.” (77). It follows that practises of scientific exploration can be considered an integral element of the long-term process of European contact with and domination over non-European people and places.

In examining the writings of the emergent geographical science of the Royal Geographical Society (R.G.S.) in the mid-nineteenth century, I am

concerned with treating it as an example of *colonial discourse*. This and the following chapter will demonstrate that the geographical knowledge of this period contributed to the construction of “the particular regime of visibility deployed in colonial discourse.” (Bhabha, 1983:33). The published knowledge appearing in the *Journal and Proceedings* of the R.G.S. is a record of the accumulated information and reflections of travellers, explorers, and scholars, great and famous individuals as well as historically unimportant and anonymous figures. By focusing on this ‘archive’ we can situate the great names of geographical science amongst those more mundane figures who contributed equally to the ‘worlding’ of the world to which the discourse of geographical discovery contributed. The knowledge under examination does not belong to a genre of heroic narratives of exploration and discovery, but is rather more akin to what Pratt (1985:127) calls the “informational branch of travel writing”, a genre which is often just “terribly boring” (131).

This and the next chapter provide an account of the knowledge produced by the R.G.S. and disseminated through its regular publications from 1831 to 1873. The year of Livingstone’s death, closely following that of Roderick Murchison, 1873 seems an appropriately symbolic limit around which to enclose the examination of the R.G.S.’s emergence within a dynamic imperial and colonial context. My intention in what follows is not to provide a fully exhaustive account of the R.G.S. in this period, but to provide an analysis of some of the features which characterise the knowledge it produced (particularly with respect to representations of racial difference and representations of

geographical space), which indicate where effects of domination, exclusion, and appropriation structure that knowledge at its very core.

Gallagher & Robinson's (1953) revisionist thesis concerning 'Free Trade Imperialism' focuses attention upon the complex and varied forms in which European power and influence was secured in ways other than direct political-military colonial occupation. They argue that the decisive period in British expansion came before the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in the mid-Victorian period. This period of *informal* empire, when free-trade and commercial treaties were the means of securing power and influence, was one in which European powers established a position of dominance without having to resort to direct occupation and administration. Their account allows us to consider the cultural and scientific practices of this period as thoroughly part of the specific mode of economic and political relations peculiar to the mode of imperialism of the time, without abandoning the concern with how they also have effects with respect to the subsequent phenomenon of formal empire.

Curtin (1964) similarly identifies the mid-nineteenth century as crucial, since in this period the transition from the humanitarian concerns animating the movements for the abolition of slavery to more explicitly imperialist themes took place. Likewise, for Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:118), it was abolitionism that brought about the substitution of the bonds of an imperialism based on free trade for those of slavery. And not the least significant achievement of anti-slavery humanitarianism from the late-eighteenth century onwards was the deployment of a discourse of racialisation in order to impose control upon the field of freed labour-power that followed the abolition of

slavery. It was out of this reform minded, liberal tradition of abolitionism that the imperialist ethos emerged, and the discourse of the R.G.S. in this period is a fine example of just such a connection between humanitarianism and imperialism, understood as a process of geographical violence and appropriation.

Brantlinger (1988:173-97) argues that the construction of the notion of Africa as a 'dark continent' is an achievement of the mid-Victorian period, in which an intense interest and fascination with Africa is established in British culture (cf. Jarosz, 1992). Within the developing imperial imaginary at this time, Africa in particular becomes an object of debate, discussion, and curiosity as part of the construction of institutionalised discourses which determine who is ascribed the authority to take part in these exchanges. Brantlinger (1988:196) suggests that "Victorian imperialism both created and was created in part by a growing monopoly of discourse." This monopolisation is the condition of the ways in which Africa and other places came to be represented at this time. The right to ascribe meaning and apply names to space is steadily monopolised by Europeans in this period. Marlow, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, neatly captures the significance of this in his description of how Africa is transformed from being a blank space into a 'place of darkness' in the very process by which it is filled with 'rivers and lakes and names'. This image situates the project of geographical exploration at the very core of the process of constructing Africa as a place of physical and moral degeneracy, requiring active European intervention to lift it out of its condition of backwardness and savagery. Mudimbe's (1988:71) discussion of "the European invention of Africa" in the

nineteenth century suggests that other peoples and places are subject to a consistent reduction to frames of reference that render them intelligible to European ways of understanding. The role of explorers in this process is to insert Africa into Europe's consciousness of its historical role:

“They speak about neither Africa nor Africans, but rather justify the process of inventing and conquering a continent and naming its “primitiveness” or “disorder”, as well as the subsequent means of its exploitation and methods for its “regeneration”.

(20).

In this way, the practice of writing the geography of ‘blank spaces’ becomes an actual event in historical processes, as de Certeau (1986:139) suggests:

“What gradually fills the world's voids with words, multiplies and details representations (geographical maps, historical enactments, etc.), and thus “conquers” space by marking it with meanings, is a component of and force within history.”

This writing into existence of space is a means of founding an arena for social practices, it “makes future operations possible” (144). Following these lines of thought, we can situate the discourse of geographical discovery of the mid-nineteenth century as part of the process which Spivak (1990:129) has called the ‘worlding’ of the world, the characteristic of Europeans to represent new places as “uninscribed earth upon which they will write their inscriptions”.

The activities of the R.G.S. in this period, while not focusing solely upon Africa, were nevertheless highly influential in the ways in which Africa was

produced as an object for European action.¹ In this period, the R.G.S. becomes publicly identified above all with the exploration of Africa, especially in the 1850s and 1860s, and in so doing secures its reputation prior to its efforts to institutionalise geography within the established academic hierarchy. Founded in 1830, its early history is a combination of financial insecurity, much insignificant output, and occasionally important scientific contributions. Only after this false start, which saw bankruptcy and an inability to finance expeditions by the late forties, does the R.G.S.'s star begin to rise. It is in the influence of long time President, Roderick Murchison, and its association with the exploration of Africa, that the Society begins to realise the two basic aims of its original founders: the encouragement of scientific expeditions; and the dissemination of geographical knowledge. The R.G.S.'s published output provided a conduit for work of such notable figures as Heinrich Barth and Dr. David Livingstone, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace, and many more anonymous travellers, merchants, and military and colonial officials. From its inception, the *Journal* of the Society, and later the *Proceedings*, were the instruments with which it endeavoured to promote and diffuse the knowledge whose collection and production it oversaw. The latest official history of the R.G.S. summarises the position of this public output within the networks through which knowledge of non-European lands was disturbed:

“the *Journal* was the fountainhead, the source from which information subsequently filtered down, via word of mouth, via

¹ An indication of the importance accorded to Africa by the R.G.S. is that one whole volume of its *Journal* was set aside for Richard Burton's account of his African explorations (**R. Burton**, 1859, “The Lake Regions of Central Equatorial Africa, with notices of the Luna Mountains and the sources of the Nile”, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Volume XXIX:1-454).

libraries, via other journals, and society's via books, magic lantern lectures, photographs, newspapers and finally via schools, to a public who the more information they were given the more they wanted." (Cameron, 1980:22).

The diversity of topics, areas, approaches and opinions which find a place in the geographical knowledge promoted by the R.G.S. indicates its location within a wider network of scientific and popular institutions in which issues of natural science, theology, and human progress were debated in mid-century Victorian society, a specifically *written* network whose relative stability was maintained until the 1870s and 1880s (Young, 1985:126-63). This knowledge is entwined with the contradictory impulse of European expansion driven by 'free-trade' policies, and part of a complex project which combines 'emancipation' and 'enlightenment' with domination (Driver, 1991:140). The production of sanctioned geographical knowledge at this time is also enabled by technological developments such as the telegraph and improved weaponry (Headrick, 1981), which were integral to the process of capitalist accumulation on an ever expanding scale, developments which in the words of one R.G.S. President, referring to the potential of steam power for improving travel and navigation, were bringing about nothing short of "the annihilation, we might almost say, of space and time."²

Stafford's (1989) account of Murchison's imperious career shows that geographical knowledge in this period straddled an institutional terrain of scientific, lay, and official government arenas, which gave it direction and from

² **Presidential Address**, 1839, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* (hereafter *JRGS*), Vol. XIX:lxxxiv.

which it in turn drew its influence. The creation of an audience and public for geographical information was successfully accomplished by the R.G.S. under Murchison's stewardship. It was he who "parleyed a taste for outdoor adventure into a serious and full time professional commitment." (Gould, 1987:80). Private travellers and professional explorers came together in the pages of rudimentary ethnography and scientific speculation collected in the R.G.S.'s journals. For Stafford (1989:167), the influence of the R.G.S.'s sponsorship of African exploration is especially important:

"the activities of the explorers and the promotional machine to which they were geared created the public anticipation, actual information about resources, and climate of scientific and commercial rivalry which set the stage for the *fin de siècle* partition of Africa."

These activities were situated within a certain field of pressures and counter-pressures animating European expansion. Curtin *et al* (1978:453-4) suggest that there existed a basic tension within European polities in the nineteenth century: on the one hand, the representatives of European influence and power in the non-European periphery tended to advocate and encourage greater intervention and a widening of control; while those in the metropolitan centre tended to resist such pressures, at least until the final quarter of the century (cf. Robinson & Gallagher, 1961). Within such a field of interests, forces, and pressures, the R.G.S. stood squarely amongst the first group, made up as it was by a collection of missionaries, professional explorers, soldiers, colonial officials, and merchants, and it is this constellation of interests which determined that "[b]y

the late 1850s the R.G.S. more perfectly represented British expansionism in all its facets than any other institution in the nation.” (Stafford, 1989:211-2).

Driver (1991:136) has argued that the significance of African exploration in this period was that it “established particular ways of reading unknown landscapes.” It is with what these new ways of reading entailed, and what the textualisation of certain forms of knowledge actually achieves, that we are concerned with here. The primary aim of the nascent geographical science of the mid-nineteenth century is to establish the precise limits of reality, as an early President of the R.G.S. succinctly states: “geography is, in truth, so peculiarly a progressive science that it may be described as a continual correction of errors.”³

By the 1870s, as geography moves into a new stage within a developing educational framework, and in a changing imperial situation, a debate upon just whether the existing geography was adequately ‘scientific’ was underway. The practices which go to make up the knowledge arrived at by exploration and discovery find themselves increasingly open to question in this respect. As one commentator on this issue argued,⁴ ‘scientific geography’ was distinct from the mere empirical collection and verification of facts, since science involved the systematisation and organisation of facts in order to isolate causes and processes. The scientific status of much of what passes for geographical science, the same author complained, was open to question because of the failure to engage properly in this systematic organisation of facts into scientific explanation. But if this is the terrain upon which new conflicts are fought out,

³ **Presidential Address**, 1838, JRGS, Vol. XVI:lii.

⁴ **Gen. R. Strachey**, 1871-2, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. XVI:443-450.

then this only serves to reinforce the initial authority claimed for the geography of the R.G.S. since its inception, an authority derived from being the discourse which established the precise boundaries which separated geographical fact from geographical fiction, reality from myth, and truth from error, and thus determined the facts which could subsequently be refashioned into systematic science.

This claim to be the science which dealt in the deceptively mundane business of facts makes it worthwhile to question whether such discourse was structured by any particular regularities. For the information and data collected by scientific travellers were never collected 'raw', but always according to certain frameworks of intelligibility which determined what sort of information was gathered and ascribed the status of geographical fact. The classifications and inventories of the natural productions of different parts of the world, which made up geographical science in mid-century, are in turn the basis upon which speculation and theorisation about human and natural processes of development are based. The R.G.S.'s output from the very start consisted of a specific balance being struck between empirical observation and 'theory'. In the original statement of the new Society's goals, having outlined the primary aims with respect to the gathering of facts of different sorts and their dissemination, there is a reminder of just what the place of theory is:

"In making these observations, which have reference chiefly to facts, the committee wish, however, to guard themselves against any supposition that might be entertained, of their being hostile to theory; or of recommending to the Society to limit the

reception of communications to such only as are the result of actual observation and experiment. On the contrary they are fully aware that great benefits have been, and may yet be, derived from Speculative Geography. Theories that do not involve obvious absurdities or impossibilities, but are supported by reasonable probabilities, may serve as guides to conduct to important discoveries; by exciting curiosity they stimulate inquiry, and inquiry generally leads to truth.”⁵

The pages of the R.G.S.’s journals are indeed liberally sprinkled with contributions which use the latest information communicated from ‘the field’ to synthesise, cross-check, and produce further speculations and hypotheses about little known regions. The output of such “critical geographers”⁶ is an integral part of the discourse of geographical discovery in this period. There is not much difference between the above principle of the role of theory in relation to observation, and the understanding of this relation which underwrites the proselytising for properly ‘scientific’ geography of the early 1870s:

“Science in its broadest sense is organised knowledge, and has for its aim the observation and classification of the phenomena of which we become conscious by means of our senses, and the investigation of the causes of which those phenomena are the effects.”⁷

⁵ *JRGS*, 1831, Vol.I:xi-xii.

⁶ *JRGS*, 1867, Vol.XXXVII:xciv.

⁷ **Strachey**, 443.

If this understanding is made as a criticism of the type of geography of which the previous comment is the founding principle, then it appears that any conflict between science and mere travel or exploration revolves around the precise use to which basic facts and information are put. Both conceptions rest firmly on the same conviction that facts are gained by observation, and that the establishment and verification of the facts has been the primary achievement of geography thus far.⁸ The claims made for science from the 1870s onwards did not question that the preceding period of exploration and discovery had indeed verified the geographical facts of the world, and that this was the basic requirement for the foundation of any sort of scientific geography. Its criticisms were based on the apparent failure to have formed them into a systematic body of explanation.

If disputes about what properly constituted scientific geography centred on just how to organise and interpret facts already established, then the question which needs to be asked is whether the establishment and verification of geographical facts was a task which worked in ways which determined what sorts of systems and interpretations of geographical reality those facts would support, and defined who was and was not able to be the agent of such organisation. The emergence of a nascent geographical discipline under the auspices of the R.G.S. is part of a two-fold expansion in European horizons: one associated with the exploration of far-away places; the other associated with the development of increasingly sophisticated and specialised scientific disciplines.

Pratt argues that natural history must be understood as part of the general project

⁸ The Society's Secretary, Clements R. Markham, in his *The First Fifty Years of the Royal Geographical Society* (1881), presented the work of this period as being of 'the character of reconnaissance', and suggested that what was now required was the more systematic investigation of those regions whose basic contours had for the first time been accurately established.

whereby from the eighteenth century onwards, Europe constructed its identity from 'the outside in'. She draws attention to the "mutual engagement between natural history and European economic and political expansionism." (Pratt, 1992:38). Natural history was part of a new way of thinking about the world, and its descriptive apparatuses were consistent with the new forms of relations between Europe and the rest of the world with which the rise of new sciences coincided:

"The newly charted surfaces of the African landscapes were to have a direct connection with the universe opening up within the person, for the geographical mission expanded European knowledge of the global biology of mankind." (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991:98).

Geographical knowledge thus stands at the juncture of these two paths of expansion. The written accounts of far away places and peoples which entered into the metropolitan scientific community are the basis upon which proper scientific speculation was undertaken 'at home' concerning the place of humanity in nature. The products of such activity were therefore reliant on the types of worlds written into existence by the army of travellers and explorers who first made new facts available to the broader learned community. Stafford (1989:221) remarks that in the course of the scientific exploration of non-European lands, these lands "became precisely what was written of them", and consequently, as Stocking (1987) argues, the emergence of scientific theories of human and natural evolution was constrained by this reliance upon information and evidence of other people and places reported in "loosely descriptive natural

history or purely anecdotal terms” (65), or acquired by the “pillaging of travel accounts” (175). The R.G.S. is identified as one of the main sources of the information upon which Victorian racial and anthropological theory was dependent (79).

Thornton (1983) has also argued that the *writing* of exploration and ethnography was decisive for the ways Africa was presented to European metropolitan scholars in the nineteenth century. What he refers to as the ‘raw materials’ supplied by missionaries, explorers, etc., were the only form in which Africa was widely available as an object to be discussed and systematically examined. The writing-up of exploration is the condition of the products of this activity entering into the realms of European science. The ‘discovery on paper’ of Africa (510) was the means by which particular accounts of particular places were made available for universal scrutiny. This relation between particular ‘experience’ and universal reasoning is located in the networks of written knowledge of which the R.G.S. was a part. Thornton’s identification of the co-existence of two genres of writing in Victorian ethnography - one highly empiricist and descriptive, the other highly speculative and universalist - is also applicable to the discourse of the R.G.S., which is part of the same institutional complex by which the particular is made part of a universalising system of scientific, historical and theological speculation. But this incorporation of the ‘raw data’ of travellers, explorers and missionaries into scientific and other discourses might lead us to wonder whether this information is properly considered as ‘raw’ in the first place. In what follows, it will be argued that not only was the knowledge produced by the R.G.S. infused with themes emerging

from the 'context' of contemporary sciences of race, evolution, and natural history; but also that, even in its most 'descriptive' and 'empirical' facets, a certain relation between particularity and universality is always already inscribed within geographical writing of this time. Europe's 'spiritual geography', the self-representation of its place and role in the world, has been constructed around the image of being responsible for the value of universality itself (cf. Derrida, 1992). The centrality of Europe as the locus, guarantor and model of the universal essence of humanity, and therefore of History, is linked to a particular construction of the value of the example, where the individual, the singular, and the particular is always rendered intelligible by virtue of being inscribed within a system of universality. This specifically Eurocentric structure of representation is already evident in the apparently prosaic, descriptive accounts of travels and experiences in non-European places with which we are concerned here. The passage from reported fact of scientific organisation is enabled by the written networks by which natural science and geographical information flowed into Europe. But the conditions for this 'recontextualisation' of knowledge (Thornton, 1983:518) are already inscribed within the forms of writing in which those facts are communicated.

'The Morphological Equation'

Racial difference, at least since the eighteenth century, has been constructed in the specific context of European territorial expansion. What is distinctive about the way race has been constructed, and contested, over two centuries is that race is a category of difference which is produced *as if* it were absolute, according to an essentialist logic which erases the inherent relationality which is the condition of possibility for such differentiation in the first place. The relationality of mutual and reciprocal constitution through contact suggests that difference is not absolute, but the inherent non-identity implied by this constitutive relationality is erased in the production of racial difference under imperialistic conditions, since difference is produced as a natural biological fact. It is produced as something which is *not produced*. It is this logic that I want to trace here by examining the way race is represented in the discourses of the R.G.S.

Race appears in the discourse of the R.G.S. at those points at which the white, male European traveller encounters non-European subjects. At these moments of contact relations of difference and power are discursively presented in particular ways (Pratt, 1986a:78-80). Categorical racial difference is asserted and declared, but we can trace the relational, dynamic process of interaction and subordination that this mode of representation erases by attending closely to the very ways this categorical difference is represented. I am here concerned with the ways in which the physical characteristics, *the bodies*, of non-European peoples encountered by European travellers were described. My contention is that by examining this issue, we can identify a pervasive epistemological

attitude which recurs when one examines other elements of the discourse of discovery.

In 1854, the R.G.S. published in its *Journal* for the first time its “Hints to Travellers”,⁹ later to become a separate and regular publication of its own. These consisted of advice of all sorts to prospective travellers to foreign parts as to how to best proceed in preparing and undertaking their journeys if they were concerned to produce useful and reliable geographical information. One component of such knowledge collection was the detailing of the nature, habits, customs, amusements, and organisation of native peoples encountered. The directions include suggestions of particular things that should be observed and looked for. In order to ascertain the “moral and intellectual character” of different peoples, the ‘Hints’ advise that travellers take careful note of the following:

“Characteristic Form - dimensions, weight, colour, odour, free from uncleanness, hair, features.”

“Unnatural modifications of form - by pressure, mutilation, incision etc.”¹⁰

The characteristic features of the bodies of different human groups should be observed with particular attention to the following questions.

“What is the usual form of feature? the shape of the skull? hair? colour? stature? bodily constitution?”¹¹

⁹ “Hints to Travellers”, 1854, *JRGS*, Vol. XXIV:328-58.

¹⁰ “Hints...” 358.

¹¹ “Hints...” , 356.

We see then that the careful observation of the physical features of different peoples was regarded as a basic task of any worthwhile traveller, and such observation was to be organised according to categories which gave form to the data and which in turn secreted particular conceptual understandings in the presentation of such data. Consistent with the guidelines above, most accounts of travel presented in the R.G.S.'s regular publications contain conventional 'customs and manners' accounts made by Europeans of the people they encounter. These include descriptions of the physical appearance, the clothing and adornments, degree of cleanliness, and other practices of the people under observation, particularly such exotic pastimes as tattooing and other forms of 'bodily mutilation'. These normally appear in a way that presents such cultures as timeless and unchanging, and often as part of a general taxonomic classification and description of the flora and fauna of different lands. The following is a standard account which includes the variety of elements which go to make up descriptions of non-European human groups:

"The men of El Obied are *well made*, spare, and tall. Their features are *handsome*, their skin of a dark - brown colour. Their hair is slightly curled, they generally wear it long and plaited. Their dress consists only of a piece of cotton cloth over the pubis, with a cord round the hips to keep it in place, or of a cotton shirt and draws."

"The women are generally very beautiful, and are a shade or two lighter than the men. They wear their hair long, plaited and loaded with grease."

“Throughout the Beled-es-Sudan, but more in Kordofán than in any other part of it which I visited, many of the men, and almost all the women, have three or four perpendicular gashes on each cheek. This disfigurement is considered by them as a great beauty. I observed, also, some of the women cut on the temples, shoulders, fore-arms, breasts, and back, on one and sometimes on all these parts. This operation is performed with a razor, and the parts cut are then rubbed with wheat or flour and water to prevent the edges of the skin from uniting, and to cause the two parts to heal by granulations; for the higher the skin is raised after this process, the more beautiful is the effect produced.”¹²

Such descriptions indicate a fascination with the immediately visible appearance of different people, a fascination figured in terms of standards of beauty and ugliness. There are two sets of aesthetic standards at work in the above account: those of the people being described, on the one hand, which are the object of the account; and those according to which these people are reported as being more or less handsome or beautiful, and which determine the description of certain of their practices as ‘disfigurements’. It is the latter mode of judgement that articulates the whole scene. Bhabha argues that colonial discourse is pre-eminently a form of ‘stereotypical’ discourse. He suggests (1983:23) that “[c]olonial discourse produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable”, and insists that this relies on the articulation of racial and sexual difference. ‘Skin/race’, the primary signifier of

¹² A. T. Holroyd, 1839, “Notes on A Journey to Kordofán”, JRGs, Vol. IX:179.

difference in such discourse, is produced as *visible*. The passages above are an example of the production of such stereotypes by means of alighting upon the physical appearance of its representatives. Such stereotyping works by reducing heterogeneity to identity, by comparing all people to a pre-supposed category of ideal form. The externally imposed classification of 'skin/race' operates as a 'doctrine of entity' (cf. Hirst and Wooley, 1982:111), as the means by which a real object is produced through discursive practices which construct 'races' as homogenous entities with certain identifiable and identifying physical attributes. The logic of stereotyping has the effect of individualising by homogenising, so that individuals become examples of the whole group to which they belong.

We are examining a form of discourse which presupposes racial difference from the very start. In the year previous to the appearance of the "Hints", a paper appeared in the *Journal* that provides an analysis of the characteristic bodily form of two groups. Dr. Arthur Saunders Thompson's "Observations on the Stature, Bodily Weight, Magnitude of Chest and Physical Strength of the New Zealand Race of Men" is an account of a statistical comparison undertaken by him of a group of European and Maori males. Thompson made a series of measurements, of the height, weight, and strength, of the men in the two groups. He assumes unproblematically that the two groups are representative of their respective racial groups. The assumption of difference is presumed from the start as the very condition of the whole exercise in comparison. His measurements of all but one variable showed a considerable amount of variation amongst members of each of the two sample groups, and no identifiable aggregate difference distinguishing them significantly. Nonetheless

he produces from his results an “average” ‘New Zealander’, found to be one quarter of an inch lower in stature but of the same bodily weight as the “average” white European. That Thompson is able to claim to have found a categorical difference, when the results he used quite clearly justify no such conclusion, indicates how the apparently neutral operations of comparative method harbour quite distinctive assumptions which predetermine the form of conclusions which will be drawn.

In this piece we can see the reasoning behind the scientific classification, ordering, and comparison of human bodies. The way Thompson interprets his results indicates how this mode of objectifying and classifying different peoples presupposes categorical racial differences.¹³ Thompson finds that only in terms of physical strength is there a significant difference between his two sample groups, with his sample group of Europeans (soldiers from the 58th Regiment!) displaying more of it, and of this fact he makes a great deal. The logic of categorical differentiation is revealed most clearly when the fact of no notable difference between the groups in all the other characteristics is effectively ignored and negated as this sole difference is elevated to provide undeniable proof not only of significant racial difference, but one with a much broader historical significance. Thompson considers that his findings confirm the superiority of a whole way of life:

¹³ Thompson’s piece confirms that the project of scientific racism depends on the suppression of the question which, when posed, destroys the legitimacy of the whole exercise in comparison: “how to assign the subjects of the experiment to one ‘race’ or the other without assuming the very racial distinction the experiment is supposed to prove?” (Fields, 1990:97). The prior assumption of ‘race’ as a real, natural entity is the condition of such circular exercises in racial classification.

“To those who delight in thinking that the world is degenerating, that men were stronger in older times, before trade and civilization had changed the manners and customs of men, the foregoing facts may prove interesting, for here we observe the New Zealanders, a race just emerging from the darkest savage state, and we find that in physical strength they are much inferior to men drawn from a country where machinery and civilization have produced changes in the manners and habits of the people to an extent unknown among other civilized races.”¹⁴

I want to draw attention to both the conflation that Thompson effects by assuming his limited and haphazard experiments to be valid for such a broad comparison, and the connection made here between a stage in social development and a parallel stage in physical, biological development. There is an assumed homology between the evolutionary level of a society (a notion already loaded with assumptions of ‘progress’ and ‘civilisation’) and the condition of its characteristic biological ‘body’ (assumed to be male). Thompson makes quite clear how notions of societal evolution were internally tied to a racialised discourse of bodily differences. His is an exercise in applying the comparative method to human groups, and as such, it reveals how this operation of comparison is premised upon a hierarchical and normative ordering of different societies. It posits a shared identity in the form of a single scale according to which different groups are evaluated by abstracting particular bodily features and physical capacities for comparison.

¹⁴ **Dr. A. S. Thompson**, “Observations on the Stature, Bodily Weight, Magnitude of Chest and Physical Strength of the New Zealand Race of Men” *JRGS*, 1853, Vol. XXIII:93.

From the eighteenth century the idea of 'progress' became the dominant way of understanding different societies, so that, in effect, different places were taken to be in different times. For Bernal (1987:29), this is internally tied to the construction of evolutionary scales of racialised bodies: "The paradigm of 'races' that were intrinsically unequal in physical and mental endowment was applied to all human societies, but especially to history." The unity of mankind was affirmed by the form in which human differentiation was constructed, so that different human societies were considered to be at different points of an evolutionary scale of civilisation which was reflected in the characteristic form of physical development. Racial classification thus works in the same way as the process of surveillance and normalising judgement addressed by Foucault, by delineating degrees of normality. Differentiation, exclusion, and hierarchical classification go on within an overall homogeneity, one imposed in the form of the category 'race' itself. Being normalised, scaled, and ordered rests on accepting all peoples as being essentially the same, members of an homogenous social body - humanity - but this homogeneity is productive of effects of inequality:

"In a sense, the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity; but it individualises by making it possible to measure gaps, to define levels, to fix specialities and to render the difference useful by fitting them one to another." (Foucault 1979a:185).

This is the operation carried out by the comparison of different 'racial' groups, which identifies members of different groups by comparing the degree to which they depart from a given model of human form.

In the production of essentialist racialisation in order to justify 'civilising' missions there arises a contradiction, one clearly figured in Thompson's invocation of his results as providing a lesson of *historical* importance. This stress on the historical dimension introduces change, the possibility of development and movement. We have here then, figured in the most clear terms, a fine example of the animating tension which runs throughout colonial-geographical knowledge. This is a tension between "the synchronic panoptical vision of domination - the demand for identity, stasis - and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history - change, differentiation." (Bhabha, 1984a:126). As Stocking (1987:177) suggests, if the logic of racial scaling implies the *ideal* possibility of all groups being elevated to the same level of development, the *practice* of this form of comparison denies this promise of equality, by demonstrating the inferiority of non-Europeans precisely through showing their actual failure to rise up the evolutionary ladder. Bhabha (1983:34-5) captures the central principle of racialising discourse of this type:

"On the one hand, it proposes a teleology - under certain conditions of colonial domination and control the native is progressively reformable. On the other hand, however, it effectively displays the 'separation', makes it more visible. It is the visibility of this separation which, in denying the colonised the capacities of self-government, independence, and Western modes of civility, lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power."

This tension underlies the ambiguity of colonial discourse of the stereotype which is central to understanding its productivity as a form of colonial power.

Thompson also betrays a more basic and practical reason animating this concern to establish bodily differences. Having found little difference between his two groups in terms of height, and by extension between two whole 'races', he comments that while a man may be of a certain height, "unless he has the weight of body he will not be able to undergo much labour."¹⁵ Later, he prefaces another finding by noting the "popular opinion that people who have large chests are able to undergo much labour and endure great fatigue."¹⁶ And he comments, in a way which will subsequently be shown to be quite characteristic, on the inclination towards indolence and laziness which the people native to New Zealand display. We are informed that they have to do little work to sustain themselves in food, and are otherwise able to spend a great proportion of their time in "a dreamy state of idleness."¹⁷ This state is, he suggests, responsible for the accumulation of fat and increase in weight. What such comments make clear, amongst many other things, is that the interest in physical characteristics and features is related to a basic concern for the likely capacity of people to submit to the rigours of *labour*. It is with the body as a labouring body that Thompson is ultimately concerned, and the observation, comparison, and measurement of bodies is seen to be complicit with a tacit interest in the question of how to best put people to work. Fanon (1970:43) comments that biological racism, of the form Thompson's piece displays, works by means of

¹⁵ Thompson, 88-9.

¹⁶ Thompson, 90.

¹⁷ Thompson, 90.

the “morphological equation”, which establishes a normative relation between individual physiognomy and whole ways of life, where every person is considered nothing more than a complete example of the group of which it is a member. And when Thompson’s concern falls upon the question of the labouring capacity of different peoples, Fanon’s (45) further point is borne out, namely that this form of racial classification, which aspires to be genotypically and phenotypically exact, corresponds to a period of “crude exploitation of men’s arms and legs.”¹⁸ Similarly, JanMohamed (1985:64) argues that the construction of racial difference works to commodify whole populations into a stereotypical object, which then enables this representation to be appropriated as a resource within colonial discourse, a resource with which to represent certain groups as morally inferior and thus justify colonial occupation and exploitation. We shall in due course see that in the way racial categorisation works by abstracting elements (bodily features) and placing them in comparison with certain standards of ideal form, the logic of exchange value is at work, by which comparison is undertaken and value determined by expressing all difference in terms of something which it is assumed each entity shares, and of which each represent a greater or lesser quantity. The commodified logic of stereotypical representations of racial difference serves to suggest that it is a form of representation functionally related to the discursive refashioning of non-European native populations into potential *labour-power*.

Processes of stereotyping, the normative comparison of bodily types, conceptions of bodies as both aesthetic objects and labouring subjects, and the

¹⁸ See Blaut, 1992, on the historical specificity of biological racism.

internal relations that exists between these effects and the apparently innocent scientific operations of comparison, are all at work in Thompson's paper. The same themes recur consistently, in different combinations across a whole variety of papers not concerned with them alone, as is Thompson's. It is this repeated occurrence of the same figures, tropes, and structures of argumentation that allows us to identify a discourse of racialisation in the knowledge produced by the R.G.S.

Vision and Difference

When, in narratives of travel and exploration, the white European male subject encounters native peoples, individually or as a collective, the first thing commented upon is the external physical appearance of those people. This convention betrays a conception of cultural difference that, in equating bodily characteristics and comportment with social and moral values, reveals a persistent logic of racial stereotyping. The stereotyping objectifies those peoples encountered, denying them status as social, historical and cultural agents. In short, the ways that geographical explorers describe their encounters with 'other' peoples are a version of the disciplinary 'examination' which, for Foucault (1979a:184-5), most clearly "manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected."

Commenting on a meeting with the leader of one local group, one traveller to Africa concludes that judging from him "the Somalies are not a thick-lipped race; they are black, with crisp hair, straight noses, and well

proportioned heads, features and limbs.”¹⁹ Another notes that he was at one point in his travels provided with information by two Africans, one the slave of the other. The latter is described as a “strong built young negro, of middle size, with good forehead, large eyes, and open countenance; features not coarse, and complexion of a place, dull black, not inclining in the least to brown.”²⁰ Such comments are quite routine. The following examples from a report on Aborigines in Australia is worth quoting at length because in it the logic of such description is made particularly evident:

“They are well formed about the body and thighs, but their legs are small in proportion, and their feet very large; their heads are flat and broad with low foreheads and the back of the head projects very much; their hair is straight, like horse-hair, thick, curly or frizzled, and jet black; their eyebrows and cheekbones are extremely prominent - eyes small, sunk very bright and keen; nose flat and short, the upper lip thick and projecting; mouth remarkably large, with regular fine white teeth; chin small, and face much contracted at the bottom.”²¹

Descriptions of people being ‘too short’, ‘clumsily formed’, of the extent to which their features ‘partake of those of the negro’, reveal a concern with judging the appearance of human groups in comparison to standards of beauty related to the values of symmetry and aesthetic moderation. What is significant

¹⁹ “Extract from a Journal by Liet. W. Christopher on the East Coast of Africa”, *JRGS*, 1844, Vol. XIV:90.

²⁰ **W. D. Cooley**, 1845, “The Geography of N’yassi, or the Great Lake of Southern Africa, investigated; with an A/c. of the Overland Route from the Quanza in Angola to the Zambesi in the Government of Mozambique”, *JRGS*, Vol. XV:198-9.

²¹ **Maj. Cambell**, 1834, “Geographical memoir of Melville Island and Port Essington, on the Coburg Peninsula, N. Australia”, *JRGS*, Vol. IV:153.

in the above passage is that it condenses the process of stereotyping already discussed, the logic of which is revealed in a crucial change in grammar. It starts as a generalised description, in the third person plural, of what all the people under discussion look like, but by the end of the passage these generally shared features have been replaced by a description of a set of single features - 'them' and 'they' and 'their' eyebrows, cheek-bones, and heads slides almost imperceptibly into *the* nose, *the* upper lip, *the* mouth. The language of the passage shifts from a generalising description of a group of people into the description of one single, generalised body and its individual features. The effect is such that what started as a generalisation about the appearance of human bodies ends up as an anatomical description of almost clinical simplicity of isolated and curiously disembodied facial features. Here we see the objectification of human subjects at work, and it is revealed that to treat all members of a group as essentially the same is the preliminary to treating each as knowable as an abstracted collection of classifiable bodily parts. The focus on individual, isolated organs rests on a normative and comparative assumption that different bodies can be ordered according to a single scale. The change in grammar is thus more than mere linguistic effect: it reveals the way stereotyping orders difference according to identity, by abstracting features considered to be markers of significant difference and resituating them within an evaluative framework.

Such descriptions, more or less elaborate, not only rest on a process of producing essentialist racial bodily types, but this process is also internally connected to the implicitly hierarchical act of comparing bodies. Such

comparison works according to a principle of sameness whereby two different objects are analysed according to a presumed common unit, an operation that rests on the definition of some attributes as significant differences. The following comment contains in all its brevity the basic features of this form of racialised understanding:

“The natives are perfectly black, but their noses are not quite so flat, or their lips so large, as among the generality of negroes.”²²

This comment is exemplary precisely because it is so short. It does not involve detailed or complex argumentation, but is presented as a part of a matter-of-fact descriptive account of the manners and customs of peoples under observation. Such accounts are frequent and taken for granted events, and thus reveal in their simplicity the ‘natural attitude’ which pervaded the discourse of discovery and exploration. The repeated reference to people being ‘slightly’ made, under the ‘middle size’, of middle stature, and perhaps most frequently of all, to bodies being well or poorly ‘proportioned’, reveals that this comparison is not only founded on the prior homogenisation of variety and multiplicity into supposedly representative stereotypes, but that it operates according to a normative imperative. The discussion of bodies in ‘more or less’ terms reveals a process of differential comparison which works according to some shared measuring scale. In another dispatch, the same commentator describes how, the farther his party of travellers advanced from the coast along the Zambezi River “the more they observed the natives to improve in appearance. Of those at Morooro, many were firmly knit, stout and elegantly proportioned; the attendants on the colonel [a

²² **W. F. W. Owen**, 1833, “Narrative of a voyage to explore the shores of Africa, Arabia, and Madagascar”, *JRGS*, Vol. III:220.

local merchant] in particular, were perfect models of the human form.”²³ This passage expresses the implicit scaling of bodies which can be identified throughout the discourse under examination here. It is important to note that comments of this sort are often made in a complimentary mode. Of the daughters of the Matabele sovereign, Moselkatse, the Reverend Robert Moffat observes that “their countenances exhibited great childish sweetness, while their bodies, well washed and anointed with oil, presented the most perfect female symmetry; but the women in general are no beauties.”²⁴ Neither of the above examples express overt distaste or disapproval of the appearance of the ‘objects’ under observation. In this, however, they exemplify the logic already described more effectively. For both observers, values of symmetry, moderation and proportion in physical form are the criteria and foundations for their positive reactions to the appearances of the peoples with whom they meet. In an account of a trip up the Cameroon River, one traveller reports that his party “noticed some girls who were beautifully formed - the graceful action of their limbs in running being unimpeded by any garments.”²⁵ Another reports how his party attended the dances of local women, writing that “[t]he whole sight was delightful. The women were clothed from the waist downwards, the arms and the bottoms bare, displaying their beautiful breasts; It afforded us great pleasure to attend their dressing.”²⁶ These remarks indicate that this is a mode of

²³ **W. F. W. Owen**, 1832, “Particulars of an Expedition up the Zambesi to Sena”, *JRGS*, Vol. II:140-1.

²⁴ **Rev. R. Moffat**, 1856, “Visit to Moselkatse, King of Matabele”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXVI:98.

²⁵ **Capt. W. Allen**, 1843, “Excursion up the River of Cameroons and to the Bay of Amboises”, *JRGS*, Vol. XIII:10.

²⁶ **Capt. Hon. W. Waldergrave**, 1833, “Extracts from a Private Journal kept on board HMS *Seringupatan* in Pacific 1830”, *JRGS*, Vol. III:189.

observation underwritten by a legitimate form of taking aesthetic and sexual pleasure in what is observed. The expression of this pleasure serves to represent human groups as existing to be appreciated as objects of evaluation. This representation of pleasure is one of the means by which such descriptions solicit their audience's complicity in the project of scaling and evaluating of which they are a part, and also reveal that it is a specifically masculine audience which is being posited as the addressee of such discourse.

The appearance of an explicitly sexual theme in the account of cultural difference is far from insignificant. We can return here to Bhabha's theorisation of the discursive economy of racial differentiation, in which he argues that colonial discourse involves the articulation of racial and sexual differences such that "the colonial stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive." (1983:22). This is born out by the fragments of geographical discourse presented here, in which there is an undeniable pleasure involved in observing other peoples, and the whole operation is described in terms of the quality of the spectacle offered up to the sight. This pervasive curiosity about not only the manners and customs of other peoples, but especially about their bodies, involves more than innocent descriptive acts of observation. Such descriptions engage their audience through the communication of the pleasure as well as the anxiety and repulsion felt at observing 'other' bodies. The tension between fascination and fear animates many accounts of other peoples bodies which make up the geographical discourse of discovery.

The 'other', constructed as racially different, becomes not only totally knowable, and therefore subject to/of discipline, but at the same time a site of fantasies, fascinations and fears. In Bhabha's words (25), colonial discourse simultaneously produces the "stereotype as phobia and fetish." There is an oscillation between delight and fear in these accounts, since this observation involves mastery as a precondition of pleasure, but also, as a power-laden exercise, concomitant anxiety and fear. The important point to emphasise at this juncture about this ambivalence at the heart of stereotypical racial discourse and its sexualised underpinning, is that Bhabha argues that it rests on the centrality of *visibility* as a mode of exercising power. Colonial discourse is a form of surveillance, and the production of the stereotype rests on what he calls the "regime of the scopic drive" (28). Observing and seeing difference is the locus of the sexualised ambivalence of the discourse of the racial stereotype. Pleasure in looking represents the most obvious example of the general rule of all the accounts of difference under examination. Memmi's (1968:185-95) definition of racism as the practice of assigning values to real or imaginary differences and making them absolute by generalising them from the individual to the totality of the existence of human groups, can be supplemented by this understanding of how this assignment and generalisation is an effect of certain structures of determining difference visually. Difference is established according to a visualised logic of identity whereby human beings are categorised according to certain perceptible differences, and this form of categorisation achieves an "intensive fusion of the immediate visual - the individual, present body - with the mythical unity of 'race' as trans-geographical and originary." (Kanneh,

1991:149). Racial difference is thus constructed hierarchically, presupposing sameness as the condition of establishing difference by negative comparison with an idealised identity.

Dominant forms of constructing both racial and sexual difference which privilege vision as the source of knowledge enable the apprehension of alterity only by reducing otherness to the same (Ware, 1992:236). This is the structure of vision which Irigaray (1985) identifies in 'phallogocentric' discourses governed by an 'inexorable logic of the same'. In this "Empire of the same" (141) it is the eye which establishes *what is*, and what is not, by positing difference as lack. Difference is established according to the visual perception of deficiency, a procedure which posits an ideal model of 'proper' identity. As Memmi (1968:160) puts it, "it is in the name of an implied collective defect that the defendant is condemned." Individuals become examples of the 'race' to which they belong in a circular logic that works to naturalise the existence of 'race' as a real entity.

With this theme of vision as the modality whereby racial difference is established, we are back with Foucault's account of how specific disciplines and practices were constructed through the spatialisation of their objects of analyses. Natural history, with which geographical knowledge had such close links, was established through the organisation of knowledge of the world according to principles of spatial ordering, tabulation, and taxonomy. This spatialisation involves studying and classifying only on the basis of what is visible, such that classification and differentiation are undertaken according to particular notions of visible difference, whether in the case of plant, human, or animal life:

“Natural History is nothing more than the nomination of the visible.” (Foucault, 1970:132). The geographical knowledge of the mid-nineteenth century shares in this privileging of vision as the means of determining what is knowable. And as Fabian (1983:117) argues, once the source of knowledge of any sort is understood to be derived from the visual perception of independent objects in space, it become inevitable that human groups will be treated in the same way as any other entity which becomes the focus of this objectifying gaze: as *objects*. This treatment is one way in which the co-existence of self and other, the imbrication of European and non-European cultures and societies in the same time and space, is re-presented as separation by subordinating the other to the status of the passive object of the knowing European. When the classificatory gaze of natural history is used to identify and make sense of human difference, it becomes the means by which what is visible becomes a surface sign of moral and intellectual character, degrees of civilisation, and so on. ‘Beauty’ becomes a central facet by which to establish difference, but beauty is understood as a surface feature according to particular standards which are always already constructed in a racialised manner. Facial features, hair, skin, colour, shape of the head, eyes - all of these visible signs determine the normative ordering of different populations according to an assumed anatomical basis of racial and cultural hierarchy.

It is important to emphasise that the types of comments being examined here often tend to be favourable in their judgement. Nonetheless, they are part of broader discourse which reveals nothing short of a thorough going fascination with the bodily features of different peoples, all within a context of the

presupposed existence of categorical racial difference. This fascination extends to a concern with whether and how different peoples practice any form of ‘bodily mutilation’, and how they decorate their bodies generally, and it is expressed most often in terms of pleasure and beauty. Favourable comments belong to the same epistemology as those which are explicitly negative in their judgement, as the following descriptions of different African groups encountered in the course of a single journey indicate:

“The natives are short, rather darker than mulattoes, with low foreheads, broad and flat countenances, large eyes, and capacious eyes.”²⁷

“The inhabitants are rather below the usual size, delicate, yet well-formed, their expressions pleasing, and the complexion lighter than the mulatto.”²⁸

“The men are of middle-sized, ill-formed, with broad lips, flat noses, woolly hair, and thick lips.”²⁹

“The natives are perfectly black, but their noses are not quite so flat, or their lips so large, as among the generality of negroes.”³⁰

These descriptions display a concern with judging the appearance and form of bodily features in aesthetic terms, generalising about the appearance of whole groups, and describing this generality by reference to ideals of physical types. Taken together, the range of comments, negative as well as positive, reveal the same logic of scaling to be at work, and presuppose an understanding of

²⁷ Owen, 203.

²⁸ Owen, 203.

²⁹ Owen, 206.

³⁰ Owen, 220.

different human groups belonging to distinctive 'types' by which they can be identified and classified.

In the Presidential Address the R.G.S. of 1840, special mention is made of the death of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who is lauded as equal in intellectual stature to both Cuvier and Linnaeus for his achievements in comparative anatomy. He is described as being the first to "effectively vindicate the proper dignity of mankind" by elaborating a system for separating 'genus homo' from 'genus simia'. The President reminds his audience that Blumenbach's achievement did not stop here, and that his importance in establishing the dignity of mankind rested not only on establishing an absolute boundary between human and non-human life, but also on his separating humankind out into its distinct, proper groups as well. Blumenbach had, by the careful examination of different crania, ascertained "the leading characteristics which distinguish the European head, the African, and that of the native of eastern Asia respectively; to these, which he regarded as the principal varieties, he added two intermediate races for the native of Polynesia and those of the New World, making in all five distinctions of mankind."³¹

The interest and attention paid to Blumenbach indicates something of the 'context' of scientific activity within which the R.G.S.'s geographical knowledge was fashioned. Blumenbach was one of the first to produce academic work on classifying human races, in a system of hierarchical ordering in which whites were at the top (Bernal, 1987:27-8). He rated alongside Linnaeus, Buffon and Cuvier as a pioneer of the new scientific methods of natural history, and was

³¹ **Presidential Address**, 1840, *JRGS*, Vol. X:xliv-xlvi.

only one of a number of European scholars who undertook a scientific analysis of racial scaling (cf. Mosse, 1978:1-34). As Bernal notes, “Blumenbach believed in a unique creation of a perfect man” (1987:219), and this was the central principle of his hierarchy of races. Blumenbach’s was a hierarchy of racial differentiation which was rooted in a particular Enlightenment materialism and environmentalism, which held variations in climate and environmental conditions as causal of human physical variation, the latter always understood as ‘degeneration’ from an ideal norm. The white European was considered to be the most beautiful and gifted race, from which all others had degenerated because of inferior and unsuitable climatic and environmental factors. In other parts of the world individuals became, as Bernal puts it, “too big, too small, too weak, too strong, too brightly coloured, too drab etc.” (ibid.). This conception is well established as part of Western conceptions of the relations between nature and culture by the late-eighteenth century (Glacken, 1967). The study of races was premised upon the humanitarian principle of the unity of mankind; non-European societies could be embraced as part of this unity by explaining their difference in terms of differential evolutionary stages and different adaptive behaviour to environments. In this way, non-Europeans were conceived of as being either at stages that Europeans had passed beyond, or alternatively, as having slipped from that level by a process of physical and moral degeneration (Stocking, 1987). Such notions are very much ‘geographical’ ones, in so far as they posit certain ways of understanding the diversity of human groups in space. Difference in space becomes a sign of different points of scale of historical development (cf. Fabian, 1983). Geographical discourse of the mid-nineteenth

century is part of a network of understanding by which “differences residing in geographical space were turned and turned until they became differences residing in developmental historical time, i.e., the axis whereby the simultaneity of geographical space was transformed into the successive linearity of historical evolutionary time.” (McGrane, 1989:94). Racial classification was quite fundamental to this structure of making sense of geographical diversity. As Glacken’s (1967:591) discussion of Buffon suggests, the theory that mankind originated in the temperate zone of Europe led to the practice by which it was possible to “derive from the peoples now living there an idea of the original colour of man, and also the model by which all the other shades (*nuances*) of colour or of beauty may be judged.” Thus, racial hierarchies like those developed by Blumenbach were founded on the principle of white European male form as normal, and as the single, pure form which established everything else on a single scale of degrees of equality or inequality. As West (1982) suggests, Classical ideals of ‘beauty’, ‘proportion’ and ‘moderation’, suitably ‘Aryanised’ in the way Bernal (1987) describes, regulated the ordering and taxonomic classification of human bodies in the nineteenth century. The sciences of physiognomy and phrenology were just one element of this generalised form of understanding human diversity by imposing homogeneity in the form of ideals of bodily form.

The general currency of the notions discussed above is easily evinced in the discourse of geographical exploration. One African explorer reports in the following way on his meeting with a particular local leader: “A very trifling degree of physiognomic knowledge was required to generate the most

favourable impression as to this individual, and all of his proceedings whilst we were here in his country went to justify the high opinion formed at first sight.”³² Another, in an account of the ‘degree of civilization’ of certain groups in southern Africa, uses the latinized vocabulary of Linnaen classification to categorise groups, reporting that the people of one region belong to the designation “Austral Ethiopians”, an ‘extra-tropical family’ of the human race.³³ Such comments indicate not that physiognomy was a specific practice amongst geographical explorers, but that the attitudes and assumptions underlying such sciences were certainly a taken for granted part of more general structures of knowledge according to which impressions of the people and places encountered were represented. Geographical discourse did not at this time involve full scale scientific comparisons of different bodies, but it did remain tied to a conception of proper practice which was in its taxonomic, categorising impulse closely related to natural history. It was undertaken when ideas about physiognomy, phrenology, etc. were not only intellectually current, but also innovative and dynamic scientific field of the first importance, and informed a much wider set of discourses and practices where ideas of racial and cultural difference and superiority were well established. As Lorimer (1988:405) suggests, with reference to the debates that raged over monogenism and polygenism in mid-Victorian Britain, both sides assumed the existence of racial hierarchy, both undertook classifying varieties of humans according to racial types, and both assumed that such physical types bore upon the course of social

³² **Dr. A Smith**, 1836, “Report of the Expedition for exploring Central Africa”, *JRGS*, Vol. VI:396.

³³ **W. D. Cooley**, 1837, “A Memoir on the Civilisation of the Tribes inhabiting the Highlands near Dalagôa”, *JRGS*, Vol. VII:310.

and cultural development. Thus, racial categories were the basis upon which Europeans attempted to come to terms with human difference in a variety of discourses, not just limited to scientific ones, and 'race' functioned as a flexible conception which could support a variety of positions with respect to imperialism. The productivity of race as the mode of establishing the historical meaning of difference resides in the intimate connection it implies between the observation of human bodies and the extrapolation of universal principles about the nature of human progress.

Bhabha (1983:30) argues that “[s]kin, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognised as ‘common knowledge’ in a range of cultural, political, historical discourses, and plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted every day in colonial societies”. It is according to this understanding, and not merely as a reflection of the influence of racial science as such, that we should locate the presence of a racialised idiom in geographical knowledge at this time, which appears most frequently in the much more general form of the aestheticised description of the appearance of different peoples. The following comment made by a British diplomat, reporting on a trip in Peru, reveals the peculiarities of this mode of aesthetic discourse on foreign bodies:

“I passed two days amongst the Indians called Antes; they have good features, excellent teeth, and pleasing countenances, and their appearance is altogether superior and more engaging than that of

our civilized Indians of Peru, I saw one exceedingly handsome,
and no very ugly person amongst them.”³⁴

As part of a discourse that fiercely proclaims its own status as providing accurate, clear and lucid description of the facts, it is notable how little ‘content’ there is in this passage. What is described here is how far the appearance of a whole group of people conforms to notions of superior and inferior, pleasant and unpleasant, beautiful and ugly physical qualities. When the inherently normative gaze under the influence of classical aesthetic value is turned on people the result is a project of scaling different peoples according to certain notions of beauty and proportion, moderation and harmony (West, 1982). These prioritise an ideal of white, male bodily features as superior in the crucial sense of indicating superior intellect, civilisation, and moral value. The actual standards which determine the passing of judgement are not present in this description, which accounts for its force. It weds an aesthetic judgement to a realist conception of language, and thus produces the sense that the aesthetic qualities inhere in the object itself, as a natural component of human biology. For such a comment to make any sense presumes a sort of compact between writer and audience. It is composed entirely of value terms, and this suggests that there was a widely disseminated understanding of ideal bodily form against which different peoples were compared and ordered, and from which more general cultural conclusions could be drawn. Without such a shared understanding, the passage is wholly redundant in its own terms (as a realistic description), since from it alone one has no idea at all about what the people being described

³⁴ **Gen. Miller**, 1836, “Notice of a journey to the Northward and also to the Eastward of Cuzco, and among the Chunchos Indians, in July 1835”, *JRGS*, Vol. VI:175.

actually look like. Such a description works to communicate meaning not so much by its content, but by positioning a reader within a field whereby the value judgements presented in the account must be given substance according to models which are strictly absent from it. Only by ‘buying into’ assumptions of perfect form and appearance can such comments be received as simple descriptive observations.

Francis Galton’s report on an expedition in South Africa brings together many of the themes already noted. His account makes quite clear that identifying the physical appearance of human groups according to a racialised logic is internally related to assumptions about morality and cultural superiority, mixing ‘scientific’ notions such as remarks on facial angle drawn from phrenology with evaluative judgements based upon aesthetic norms:

“Physically speaking they are a striking race, with an appearance of strength, lightness, and daring that is highly imposing. They are tall, upright, and often remarkably handsome men, models for sculptors. They have a fair facial angle of about 70° , fine manly, open countenances, and often beautifully chiselled features; but morally they are the most worthless, thieving, and murderous vagabonds, and at least irritation their usually placid countenance changes into one of the most diabolical expressions.”³⁵

In this type of account of contact with non-European peoples, we glimpse the effacement of a power-laden encounter through the projection onto the face of

³⁵ F. Galton, 1852, “Recent Expedition into the Interior of South-western Africa”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXII:159.

the other a series of fears and anxieties which are reflective of the inequality at the basis of such encounters. Galton identifies an incongruity between physical appearance (i.e. first appearances) and degraded moral character, and this disjunction is expressed by a concern with their 'countenance'. The face is seen here as the repository of meaning, a sign to be read as an indication of the qualities of a person, or a whole population. Repeated comments about how the appearance of different peoples 'communicates to the countenance' wild, savage, honourable, or trustworthy aspects is a feature of the accounts of meetings with non-Europeans. It is at these moments of direct contact that the act of stereotyping is performed. Accounts which refer to the 'countenance' of a person or whole groups in this way are representations of interaction which effectively deny the specific social relations between the observer and the observed by rendering the latter as an ahistorical moral 'type'. Stereotyping is, following both Bhabha and Gilman (1985), a response to the crisis in control of self-identity. That contact with other peoples is routinely represented by constructing stereotypes suggests that such meetings produce moments of anxiety and potential disintegration of established identity, and that they are indeed power-laden events involving reciprocity and exchange. The stereotype is a mode of representation that effaces the structurally unequal relations within which the colonial encounter goes on by projecting anxiety and fear literally onto the face of the other, externalising the always present threat of conflict and violence and thus naturalising unequal power relations.

Robert Schomburgh, reporting on one of his extensive journeys in British Guyana, reported that one group he encountered were "much fairer in

their complexion than the Indians who inhabit the coast regions; whom they also surpass in athletic form and regularity of features.”³⁶ The fairer complexion of one group is not simply noted as fact, but is taken as an indication of superior quality. Skin colour, athletic form, regularity of features, are taken as indicators whereby a whole people are placed in an order of superiority by means of comparison, bodies being scaled and evaluated in relation to what Iris Young calls a “teleological hierarchy of the good” (1990:127). What remains unsaid here, but nevertheless central to the sense of the comment, is a conception of ideal bodily form founded on some sense of a scale from lighter to darker skin, and on some unspecified notion of regularity of feature. The same absent hierarchy informs the following comments on different human groups in Africa:

“The Karúri race is greatly deteriorated by intermixture with Slaves and other tribes. The original Kartúri race are much finer people, of taller and more slender growth, lips less thick, nose less flattened.”³⁷

“In ‘physique’ the Makalaka is inferior to the Matabele, and his features partake more of the negro type.”³⁸

Europeans are engaged in a systematic comparison of non-Europeans, whereby largely unsaid notions of ideal form operate as the measures of comparison. The comparison presupposes this ideal, and the logic of identity by which it works is internally connected to the scaling and judging of whole human societies. This is

³⁶ **R. Schomburgk**, 1842, “Excursion up the Barima and Wyuni River in British Guyana”, *JRGS*, Vol. XII:181.

³⁷ **H. Barth**, 1860, “A General Historical Description of the State of Human Society in Northern Central Africa”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXX:120.

³⁸ **Capt. F. Elton**, 1872, “Journal of an Exploration of the Limpopo River”, *JRGS*, Vol. XLII:7.

exemplified by a passage from another R.G.S. luminary who travelled extensively in British Guyana, William Hilhouse:

“The Arawaks are seldom more than five feet inches in height, and are stout and plump in proportion, but not muscular. Their necks are short, and their ankles, hands and feet, particularly those of the women, remarkably small. The eyes slope upwards towards the temples, and the forehead is uniformly lower than that of the European. This trait of physiognomy may be supposed indicative of inferiority of intellect, but the cranium is comparably superior to that of the negro, whose powers of mind are as much inferior to those of the Indian, as are those of the latter to the powers of the European [...] Some of the castes are almost as fair as the Spaniards or Italians; whilst those who live near the sea are of a very dark brown, sometimes as dark as what is called a yellow-skinned negro. But the straight, strong, black hair, small features, and well proportioned limbs, are peculiarities that never allow the Indian to be mistaken for the African, even if alike in colour.”³⁹

Hilhouse makes sense of the status of a particular society by comparing its generalised, typical ‘body’ with those of other parts of the world, and by drawing conclusions about degrees of civilisation and moral development from this comparison. Neutral and often favourable comments on physical appearance presuppose the process of hierarchical judging and normative scaling. Already

³⁹ **W. Hilhouse**, 1832, “Notice of the Indians settled in the Interior of British Guyana”, *JRGS*, Vol. II:229.

inscribed in such descriptions is the subsequent work to which they will be put in establishing the pecking order of different cultures, their relative position in the quasi-evolutionary progressive scale which leads from savagery and barbarism to civilisation, and from black to white. The following extract from the report of an expedition along the Gambia River again highlights how even those comments which are openly favourable in their tone nonetheless presuppose the assumption of proper form and judgement of difference in terms of greater or lesser deviation from an absent ideal:

“The Foulahs are decidedly handsome, many of them being a light copper colour, although the majority are considerably darker. Their features regular and good, and unlike the Mandingoes and Joloffs, they have small mouths, European lips, and noses inclining towards the aquiline; hair soft and silky, but not woolly: well defined black eyebrows, long eyelashes, and handsome black eyes; tall, well-proportioned and of erect and graceful figure; some of the young women are very good looking, and would be considered beautiful even in Europe.”⁴⁰

A more pertinent example could not be found of the way in which the description of physical features, quite apart from operating according to a stereotypical logic, is thoroughly overdetermined by an aestheticising commentary wherein European appearance and considerations of form are valued most highly.

⁴⁰ Abridged A/c. of an Expedition of about 200 miles up the Gambia, by Gov. Ingram”, 1847, *JRGS*, Vol. XVII:153.

Race as Geographical Discourse

That the discourse of geographical discovery contains racialised description of different human groups, and that this takes the form of passing aesthetic judgements on human appearance, is not so much an effect of geography being part of a wider ‘context’ as it is of this range of sciences of race and human difference being ‘geographical’ in a broader sense than that covered by specific institutional nomenclature. A complex ensemble of aesthetics, morality, normalising judgement, observation, and comparison is at work in the following passage, an exemplary account of racial stereotyping as it works in geographical knowledge:

“The coast of Arabia, as before said, is essentially different in appearance from that of India. Instead of amygdaloid and basaltic rocks which, in the latter, bound the shores of the ocean, we have the perpendicular cliffs of lime and sandstone, with alternate shelving banks of white calcareous earth: for the red ferruginous soil which covers the mountain sides, and gives nourishment to grass and brushwood, we have interminable hills of bare rock, barren heaps of trap turf, and breccia, where not a blade of vegetation is seen: for the green colour of the highlands, we have a brown or unpleasant grey appearance of the surface; and then the character and costume of the people are quite as unlike the other as is the nature of the country. The brown and sun-burnt visage, the slender but active form, and energetic manner of the Arab, clad scantily, form a no less striking difference to the fair

complexion, the sleek look, and indolent movements of the Hindu merchant, clothed in ample folds of red turban and white dhotar, who is here exiled from his native land in pursuit of gain. The fine regular features of the Sumali traders from Barbara; their ringlets of soft hair, artificially changed to a flaxen colour, and allowed to flow negligently around their shoulders, here again present a contrast to the jet black complexions and woolly hair or the Somalis from Ajam, who have not the thick lips or protruding mouth of the negro.”⁴¹

The presentation of stereotypical figures is here made to appear in relation to an equally normative description of landscapes. The relation established in this passage between environmental variation and difference in racial and cultural ‘type’ is representative of the environmentalism which characterises many of the scientific accounts of racial classification. These were theories of human behaviour and variability in which ‘races’ were explained by environmental factors and conditions. This environmentalism was an integral part of such racial discourse, on the one hand implying the possibility of change of physical attributes, but generally articulating this potential in terms of degeneration and deviation due to unfavourable environmental conditions. This implication is made clear by the remarks of Murchison, commenting on the significance of Galton’s travels in South Africa:

⁴¹ **Commander, J. Bird**, 1834, “Observations on the Manner of the inhabitants who occupy the southern coast of Arabia and shores of the Red Sea: with remarks on the Ancient and Modern Geography of that quarter, and the Route, through Desert, from Kosir to Kereh”, *JRGS*, Vol. IV:194.

“In delineating the moral character, as well as the physical confirmation of the different tribes or nations of South Africa, it is interesting to observe, from the observations of Mr. Galton, how their differences are connected with the form, subsoil and vegetation of the respective lands. Thus, the arid inland plateaux, covered only with thick jungle and short brushwood, hold the dwarfed and sinewy Bushmen; the more open, hilly, and undulating pasture-lands the Damarras, a nation of independent herdsmen, each chief of a family being supreme in his own little circle; whilst the rich corn-lands on the north are occupied by the race which is the most civilised and advanced, the Ovampo.”⁴²

There is a direct connection between the bodies of African people and African landscapes being drawn here. The same form of aestheticised description is used to represent both people and their lands, indicating that there is a complex association at work between scaling bodies and evaluating the prospects of different territories. In this way, a correlation between the prospects for ‘improving’ the land of different places, and for ‘improving’ the condition of the people in those places, is established through and the discourse of racial difference, thereby confirming the twin moral imperatives which drive the geographical mission of mid-nineteenth century.

The environmental causality underlying many racial classifications indicates that the connection between this form of knowledge and geographical discourse was far from contingent. Discussing the artificiality of racial

⁴² **Presidential Address**, 1852, *JRGS*, Vol. XXII:cxix.

classification, Gould (1978:231-36) points out that in fact this practice always has been a politically charged way of dealing with the *geographical* variability and human cultures. 'Race' is one way of dealing with and acting towards human social and cultural variability. Its presence in geographical discourse is not coincidental, but quite structural to the production of such knowledge in a colonial context, since geography is, above all else, a science that takes variation and difference as its object. This object, variation itself, is not an independent *a priori* given, but is 'worked up' in specific ways. Geography, as a 'European science', does not simply present the world's physical and human variation as it really is. It represents that variation and differentiation from a particular social and historical-geographical position and orientation *vis-à-vis* the world, which defines what counts as variation and what that variation means according to normalising standards. Racialisation is a process intimately tied to the production of geographical knowledge, to such an extent that one can propose not that geographical knowledge of the nineteenth century was infiltrated or manipulated by racial ideology, but that we might better understand the articulation of domination through the discursive production of 'race' as always already a specific way of apprehending the geographical variation of human societies. Understood thus, the fact that the vocabulary of racial categorisation was such a taken for granted facet of geographical discourse is not to be seen as an aberration, but as wholly consistent with an aspiration to be scientific. The discourse of 'race' was an integral part of the geographical knowledge marshalled by the R.G.S. precisely because it was a mode of appropriating one component of the overall geographical variation that the explicitly synthesising

institution of official geography had set itself the task of describing. 'Race' in this historical moment names variation in cultural and social organisations in a way that has specific effects for how that variability is understood and acted upon. Racialisation is a specific way of appropriating and signifying variation, one which privileges identity by imposing homogeneity and unity, and establishes difference only under the sign of this sameness as deviation from identity. 'Race' in the nineteenth century is thus a product of social practices which apprehend geographical variability through a particular lens.

White Writing

Any public sphere depends upon institutionalised modes of publicity, and in the nineteenth century the printed word was the mode of publicity constitutive of the public sphere of scientific knowledge of which the R.G.S. was a part. The publications of the R.G.S. did not merely report already scientific knowledge by making it public; rather, its status as 'scientific' depended upon its being open to rational public scrutiny. The new Society's publications were therefore integral to its scientific credentials. Warner (1992) argues that a specific subjective attitude is required when reading public discourse as such, one which supports the assumption that the text addresses both me as an individual but no one reader in particular. The awareness of writing for an anonymous audience and of reading a text being read by unknown others is built into the very meaning of the modern printed object as it has emerged historically since the eighteenth century (379-80). Writing for a modern public requires the necessary assumption of an anonymous

subjectivity and an abstract audience, and presumes the *disincorporation* of both authors and readers, an indifference to the particulars of gender, race, class, etc. The forms of publicity required by modern public discourse thus rest upon the mobilisation of various rhetorical strategies of personal abstraction. Signifiers of embodiment or interest are markers of particularity, and run counter to the required self-abstraction which is the condition of being a subject of public discourse. The effort at marking racial difference in the discourse of the R.G.S. constitutes the author/reader as unmarked, disembodied, and therefore able to abstract from their particularity and enter into the imagined community of 'missionaries of science'. The discursive representation of certain embodied subjectivities mired in particularity is the rhetorical condition of this discourse being read as public language, since this explicit marking of racially embodied subjects posits the existence of racially unmarked subjects as its necessary corollary. The scientific status of the R.G.S.'s knowledge is constituted by the persistent racialisation of certain subjects, since it is the discursive production of whiteness as an unmarked subject-position which provides access to the self-abstraction which is the founding condition of the *publicity* of the R.G.S.'s geographical science.

Racialisation is an effect of ways of recognising difference by assimilating alterity within a framework of the same. A remark by Dr. Charles Tilstone Beke, relaying information obtained from an African slave about country he has not himself traversed, exemplifies this operation and its tensions. In this quoted passage we see at work the symptomatic act of correcting knowledge provided by non-Europeans. It is the actual content of what is

corrected that I want to emphasise here. The information of the slave, Dilbo, on areas he is familiar with is reported in the following manner:

“The inhabitants are of various shades of colour: some nearly black; others, to use Dilbo’s expression, nearly as red (we should say white) as ourselves.”⁴³

In the act of correcting Dilbo’s information, Beke draws attention to the artificiality, the constructedness of racial categories. We see here that race is above all a signifier, a ‘trope of difference’ (cf. Gates, 1985). Beke’s gesture of correction reappropriates his interlocutor’s information and reinscribes it into a culturally specific order of differentiation in which ‘white’ is the norm against which all else is judged. But this example shows that the most obvious thing, skin colour, is itself understood and recognised according to particular ways of arranging the world discursively. Skin colour is the primary mode of racial differentiation and we have seen that its visibility is crucial to its effectivity as a signifier of discrimination: “The difference of the object of discrimination is at once visible and natural - colour as the cultural/political sign of inferiority or degeneracy, skin as its natural ‘*identity*’.” (Bhabha, 1983:32). Beke’s remarks reveal that the visibility of skin as a racial signifier has to be carefully maintained. The degree of ‘whiteness’ or ‘blackness’ of skin cannot be so natural or obvious as it may at first appear if it might always be mistaken by the uninitiated as ‘redness’. The immediacy and obviousness of race as natural is a specifically structured articulation of a discursive field of visibility. In having to ‘correct’ his informant, Beke says out loud the category ‘white’, which is

⁴³ Dr. C. T. Beke, 1842, “Communications respecting the Geography of Southern Abyssinia”, *JRGS*, Vol. XII:87.

otherwise notable for its absence in the discourse of racialised cultural difference. In so doing, the unmarked quality of the European participants in this discourse is thrown into new relief: 'white' as the precondition of racialised vision becomes an object of scrutiny once it has to be explicitly posited as such, and is no longer simply assumed (Haraway, 1989:152). In Beke's passing comment the process of producing 'race' as natural is shown, by way of a casual parentheses, to be a politically charged mode of differentiating human groups. It throws into relief the general way in which race is framed in this geographical discourse: 'race' is innocently recognised as natural by *constructing* it as immediately *visible*.

Bhabha's account of the dynamics of colonial discourse locates the function of racial discourse in the differential form of subjectification it effects in relation to the colonised and coloniser. For him, colonial discourse "seeks authorisation for its strategies by the production of knowledges of coloniser and colonised which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction." (1983:23). We are thus led to ask what the presence of a racial idiom in the geographical knowledge produced by the R.G.S. tells us about that knowledge. In the process of producing race as real and knowable through specific constellations of aesthetic and epistemological practices, the racialised populations become identified with other types of devalued and degraded knowledge. The logic at work is self-reproducing: the assumptions of 'proper' knowledge which underwrite the racial stereotyping of

other societies and cultures also leads to the devaluation of those peoples as potential subjects of knowledge, and not least as the subjects of geographical knowledge.

Beke's gesture of correction reveals that there is the most intimate connection between the discourse of racialisation on the one hand, and the asymmetrical organisation of cognitive legitimacy on the other. The 'antithetical evaluation' of coloniser and colonised which stereotypical racialisation produces bears significantly upon the determination of who has the adequate capability and rightful capacity to administer geographical space itself, the issue examined in the following chapter.

6

MISSIONARIES OF SCIENCE II

Phantoms in the Representation of Colonial Space

Narrations of Possession

In the previous chapter it was shown that in the discourse of geographical discovery produced by the R.G.S., non-Europeans were routinely represented according to hierarchical normative understandings of the relations between physical appearance on the one hand, and character, behaviour, and moral development, on the other. This racialisation of non-Europeans is part of the process of “thingification” which characterises the colonial enterprise (Césaire, 1972:22). The appearance of a racialised idiom cannot be detached from the structure of the knowledge of geographical facts within which it appears. Haraway (1989:13) argues that predominant modern modes of knowledge production operate to construct the object of knowledge as a resource to be appropriated: “the object both guarantees and refreshes the power of the knower, but any status as *agent* in the production of knowledge must be denied the object.” This suggests that the racialisation of non-Europeans in geographical discourse, making them objects of contemplation and curiosity through the frameworks of racial scaling and judgement, works to deny them status as agents of geographical knowledge. This chapter focuses upon the ways in which the geographical knowledge and practices of non-

Europeans are denied legitimacy in the course of establishing just what the geographical 'facts' about their lands are.

The R.G.S. was one of those institutions that in the nineteenth century oversaw the 'archivalization of local knowledges', involving the collection of myriad bits and pieces of information at the imperial margins and their translation into a global economy of knowledge (Richards, 1993). This centripetal network constructed the non-European world as merely the repository of 'raw' data, and sequestered for the educated elites of the imperial metropolis the privilege of ordering this data into universal systems of thought (Hountindji, 1992). This global structure of knowledge constitutes an imperial subject around the 'fantasy' of an empire controlled through information and knowledge rather than by force. This is a subject of discourses which arrange and order information collected from multiple sources, yet which admit only a limited range of subjects to the role of administering that knowledge in systematic form. The resulting tension over the question of *agency* is marked in the disjunctures and contradictions of the textual archive that this effort at producing comprehensive knowledge has bequeathed us. Claims and assurances made in these texts with regard to a European monopoly over scientific knowledge are undone by the rhetorical forms in which they are framed, which work to cover over the unstable conditions of contact and appropriation which underwrite the global archivalization of knowledge.

The approach which this sort of archive therefore requires is exemplified by Greenfield's (1991) reading of Lewis and Clark's published account of their expedition westward across North America. This account is

addressed to a public realm to which the ideology of westward expansion into an essentially empty continent was foundational. The public maintenance of this ideology required the re-writing of their everyday experiences of co-operation with indigenous societies. The resultant text retains evidence of the discontinuities between the explorers' expectations and actual events. The text is animated by an effort to solve the problem of how to authoritatively secure the link between their audience and their own assumed rightful possession of apparently 'unknown' territories. The authority of the explorers is, of course, based upon their actually having 'been there' (cf. Geertz, 1988:1-24), but the communication of this authority inevitably requires the reporting of the everyday interaction with local peoples. The success of their expedition, and therefore their figurative possession of 'empty' land, depended on the ability to communicate effectively on local matters, not upon scientific skills or abstract legal claims. The rhetoric of practical co-operation present in their text therefore limits the authority of science and law. The rhetoric of practical interaction "implicitly acknowledges what the legal and scientific deny, that the Western continent is a mosaic of inhabited lands whose peoples have their own senses of history and destiny independent of that of the United States." (Greenfield, 1991:23). The rhetoric of practical interaction contradicts the claims of science and law, which would present the explorers' actions as stemming from a predestined imperial design of which they are merely the appointed bearers, since it "shows these agents developing themselves as alternative authorities and their errand as a thing in itself, taking its definition from its enactment rather than design." (ibid.). And as Greenfield suggests,

this practical idiom implies the possibility of an altogether different way of imagining the relationship between different societies.

Greenfield's discussion of the overlapping rhetorics of Lewis and Clark's *History* introduces the dimensions which will guide the reading of the R.G.S.'s published discourses in this chapter. The same tensions characterise this textual archive, constituted as it is by the same task of re-presenting to a metropolitan public the contingencies of geographical exploration which, in principle, threaten to undermine the rightful and singular authority claimed by Europeans over the world's spaces.

Conflicts over the rightful possession and control of land, determining the legitimacy of rival claims to determine its use and future development, are fought out and decided in multiple institutional sites, including written discourses (Said, 1993). The discourse of geographical discovery emanating from the R.G.S. in the mid-nineteenth century is one form of 'narrative' in which thinking about and deciding upon the rightful possession of other people's territory was undertaken. And this is particularly true with respect to the continent of Africa. 'Africa' has long figured as the limit of European knowledge and consciousness, and one indication of the extent to which this is the case is the position it holds in classic liberal critiques of European imperialism. Arendt's (1968) account of the institutional and ideological roots of European racism repeats the vision of Africa as a landscape barely bearing any signs of humanity at all. In proposing a strict separation between 'race-thinking', of the late-eighteenth century and early and mid-nineteenth centuries, and the 'racism' that accompanied the Scramble for Africa from the

1870s onwards, she argues that 'race-thinking' only became a practical tool of domination in response to the 'shock' that Africa presented to European sensibilities. The 'shock' that encounters with Africans caused arose from the fact "that they treated Nature as their undisputed master, that they had not created a human world, a human reality, and that therefore nature had remained, in all its majesty, the only overwhelming reality - compared to which they appeared to be phantoms, weak and ghostlike." (73). This theme of Africa as a place where human society has barely emerged from an overwhelming and overpowering nature has a long history in Western thought, and betrays a conception that History is founded by the differentiation from and control of Nature by Man. That it reappears in one of the most sustained condemnations of European thought and society with respect to imperialism and racism indicates the strength of certain modes of imagining non-European peoples and places. In what follows, we shall see how the 'experience' that Arendt repeats as if it were real is in fact the product of certain ways of representing the dependencies upon which the scientific appropriation of Africa and other non-European places rested. It is this representation that makes inhabitants of non-European geographies appear only as fleeting presences in otherwise natural landscapes. If Europeans construct non-Europeans as phantoms, we can expect that the apparently objective products of geographical knowledge remain haunted by these figures, whose ghostly intrusions enable us to unstitch the warp of this discourse.

Geographical Invasion

Africa stood in very particular relation to other parts of the world in the geographical imagination of nineteenth century Europe. As Miller (1985:22) notes, “From the earliest times, Black Africa was experienced as the literal end of European knowledge”, and it is this characteristic that leads to the centrality of Africa to the R.G.S.’s activities. When the state of geographical knowledge comes to be summarised, Africa is repeatedly referred to as still being largely a *‘terra incognita’*. Africa’s importance in the imaginary of discovery arises from it being not only ‘blank’, but ‘old’ as well. Africa takes on a particular moral significance as a place that has slipped backwards or failed to develop along the scale of civilisation. It offers a particular challenge to Europeans as the place that has resisted their attentions for so very long. The complex of assumptions and desires animating the fascination with Africa amongst the geographical fraternity are succinctly stated in the congratulations extended by the President of the R.G.S. in 1850 to Dr. David Livingstone for his success in opening up new prospects of discovery:

“Geographical discovery in Africa has long commanded, and will ever command, a greater degree of interest than in, perhaps, any other portion of the globe; and with reason: for while it was one of the earliest inhabited portions of the world, and some of its people shone before all other nations in the scientific and industrial arts, it is now the least known and least civilised of any. Indeed, the intelligent races of Europe have less knowledge of it in the present day than they had 2000 years

ago; and ignorance, with debasing and repulsive barbarism, reign almost supreme from one end of that vast peninsula to the other.”¹

A relation between the lack of knowledge of Africa and the ignorance of Africans is established here. European explorers are seen to be slowly rolling back the frontiers of ignorance, establishing the facts about Africa and laying the basis for the banishment of barbarism at the same time. Europeans and Africans both suffer from ignorance, but this burden is borne unequally. European ignorance is temporary, and is only admitted as a preliminary to sketching the path by which it is about to be overcome. African ignorance is a moral condition. Enlightenment is a light thrown upon Africa by Europeans, which relieves their own curiosity and at the same time sets about uplifting the benighted figures who appear in the shadows thrown by that light. The power to overcome ignorance belongs only to Europeans. At the head of the process by which enlightenment is brought to Africa and Africans is the process sponsored by the R.G.S. and other agencies by which Africa was “geographically invaded”.²

The interest of geographical science with the respect to British power and influence were openly espoused from the very start by the R.G.S. The scientific description of the geography of non-European territories which developed from the late-eighteenth century onwards involved the “systematic description of the earth’s surface as the repository of use values, as the dynamic field within which the natural processes that could be harnessed for

¹ **Presidential Address**, 1850, *JRGS*, Vol. XX:xxx.

² **Presidential Address**, 1850, *JRGS*, Vol. XX:lxiii.

human action had their being.” (Harvey, 1984:2). Throughout the period under examination, the concern with the potential of Africa is not tied to an explicit concern with direct appropriation of lands and European settlement. The task of ascertaining the ‘natural productions’ of African lands is driven by a project of overcoming the slave trade and bringing ‘civilisation’ to a benighted Africa by means of ‘Commerce and Christianity’. The activities of explorers and scientific travellers extended beyond the concerns of ‘science’ as such. They were seen to be operating, more or less explicitly, as trade ambassadors, charged with the task of encouraging and securing conditions for commercial exchange with amenable local groups. It is important to emphasise this focus on *commerce* rather than *colonies* as the preferred form of interaction, so that we might indicate how the limitations of this rhetoric of legitimate trade and missionary activity is undermined in the very process by which it is articulated.

The R.G.S.’s project is to contribute to the spread of Civilisation, Commerce, and Christian religion by supporting the geographical exploration and discovery of benighted regions:

“The vast untrodden steppes in the interior of Africa may be pregnant with objects of interest in the vegetable or mineral kingdom, which, with the progress of discovery, may open out new sources of wealth to our commercial adventurers, whilst the inhabitants will in the fullness of time be ready to receive the blessings of liberty, which we may impart to them.”³

³ **Presidential Address**, 1838, *JRGS*, Vol. XII:liv.

Geographical science is presented as the arbiter of a bargain whereby, in return for the privilege of entering into commercial relations beneficial to both sides, the fruits of Christian civilisation will be bestowed upon non-Europeans. Geography is charged with a mission of both earthly and heavenly significance, as one R.G.S. President explains, since its activities have value for both the politician and merchant in expanding the scope of capitalist commerce, but are of service also to “the Divine, who foresees in the extension of our science, fresh means of spreading the blessings of Christianity, and its attendant, the civilisation of man”.⁴ Geographers, and particularly those apparently solitary figures expanding the horizons of geographical knowledge through exploration in Africa, are described as “volunteers in the van of the great march of science, civilisation, and Christianity”.⁵ At the head of a multifaceted project to expand European hegemony through Commerce, Culture, and Christianity, is geographical knowledge itself, and prime responsibility for this project consequently falls upon its practitioners, who are nothing short of being “missionaries of science”.⁶

The set of concerns structuring the ‘intelligence’ returned about foreign lands and disseminated through the R.G.S. were given colourful expression in the annual Presidential Addresses. They can also be seen in the concern in reports of travels to relay information not only about the natural capabilities of soils, but also with the degree to which peoples display any

⁴ **Presidential Address**, 1856, *JRGS*, Vol. XXVI:ccxxxiv.

⁵ **Presidential Address**, 1855, *JRGS*, Vol. XXV:cxxxii.

⁶ **Presidential Address**, 1855, *JRGS*, Vol. XXV:cxxxii.

conception of a Supreme Being; have notions of an afterlife; practice any religious ceremonies; to what extent they understand conceptions of private property; the extent and form of the use of mediums of exchange; whether having a 'plurality of wives' is common; the forms of government. All of these are taken as signs of the degree to which different groups are ready to 'receive' the twin blessings of civilisation and commerce. The geography of non-European places is rendered intelligible according to a project aimed at extending the frontiers of capitalist commodity exchange and Western culture. These twin aims synthesise around the mission to finally banish the 'illegitimate' and barbarous trade in people which is their primary moral justification, a trade reinterpreted in the mid-century as arising out of African barbarism itself. Murchison ably expresses the place of the explorer in this constellation of interests in his comments on the importance of Livingstone's foray to finally establish the watershed of the Nile:

"None feels more strongly than the honest and long-tired Livingstone, that the introduction of a kindly intercourse through legitimate trade, and the establishment of confidence on the part of the natives, must be the forerunner of all efforts to convert the untutored negro to Christianity."⁷

If it is within a context of 'Free Trade Imperialism' that the activities of the R.G.S. are undertaken in this period, then this should not be taken to imply that such aims did not involve an increase in influence and intervention in non-European territories. William Desborough Cooley makes this quite clear,

⁷ **Presidential Address**, 1865, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXV:clxxvii.

in a discussion of the prospects for opening trade with different groups in South Africa in the 1830s.⁸ The Portuguese have produced such limited knowledge about the geography of the interior of southern Africa, he suggests, because their relations with the peoples of the region have been far too 'external', this in turn being a reflection of the balance of power structuring this contact. Cooley is explicit that the mission to convert and trade with indigenous people requires an active intervention on behalf of commerce and civilisation, a greater degree of intervention in the internal relations of African societies, and a change in the balance of power and force which this implies. Of particular concern in this respect is securing 'strong government' as the condition of the activities of missionaries, merchants and explorers alike. As James Grant's comments demonstrate, the project to overcome slavery and barbarism and to open beneficial trade also needs to overcome the major barrier to such progress that 'Mohamedan' governments such as that of Egypt in the 1860s and 1870s are seen to represent:

“for the sake of the fine independent races of Uganda and Karagweh and their fertile country, I hope and trust that civilisation may be introduced among them by Christians, not by Mahomedan races, who would turn the whole country into a market for slaves. The trade of the east coast of Africa is being developed more rapidly now since the opening of the Suez canal, but the interior should be penetrated to obtain its products, and foreign traders should push in from the east coast

⁸ W. D. Cooley, 1837, "A Memoir on the Civilisation of the Tribes inhabiting the Highlands near Dalagôa Bay", *JRGS*, Vol. VII.

to Egypt, protecting the people from Mohamedanism, founding trading depots at different points, and showing their intolerance of slavery.”⁹

Here we have an example of the convention whereby intervention and conquest, based ultimately on force, is presented as an act undertaken on behalf of indigenous populations, and indeed the land itself, so that the reality of the process is effaced and made to appear as an “historically appropriate event” (Spivak, 1986:231). The contribution to the reality of conquest and appropriation made by the production of geographical knowledge lies precisely in such forms of representation.

⁹ **Lt. Col. J. A. Grant**, 1872, “Summary of Observations on the Geography, Climate, and Natural History on the Lake Regions of Equatorial Africa, made by the Speke and Grant Expedition, 1860-63”, *JRGS*, Vol. XLII:251.

Imperial Prospects

The description of geographical space in the discourse under examination works by ascribing *value* to landscapes. As Pratt (1988) suggests, the treatment of colonial landscapes as commodities is indicated by the ways aesthetic value is figured in their representation. In the knowledge produced by the R.G.S., frequent reference is made to ‘fine’ and ‘promising’ tracts of land being observed, and to ‘delightful’, ‘beautiful’, and ‘romantic’ scenery. The significance of this sort of vocabulary is best approached by attending to the way in which negative value is ascribed to landscapes by the convention of referring to them as ‘barren’, ‘dreary’, and ‘monotonous’. This type of description ascribes to the nature of the object observed what it would seem more appropriate to identify as a particular experience of the individual travelling through and observing it. In this way, the effect is created of making the existence of geographical objects appear as if they exist to be travelled in and observed. Moreover, the value attributed in this way to colonial space rests on particular conventions of visual pleasure. ‘Monotonous’ landscapes are those which defy easy and pleasurable inspection and scrutiny by the eye:

“Atbura is a very flat country, with mountains scattered here and there, like stones placed on a floor. For the most part the soil is thickly covered with trees and grass, or grass only; and in the endless plains which we traversed, it was frequently impossible to select a single object on which the eye could rest.”¹⁰

¹⁰ M. Adolphe Linant, 1832, “Journal of a Voyage on the Bahr”, *JRGS*, Vol. II:188.

The lack of variation and differentiation leads to a negative judgement being cast, indicating that landscapes are being evaluated according to whether they offer themselves up to easy visual apprehension. Edward Vogel's comments, reporting on his travels in Central Africa, are typical of the interweaving of this visual epistemology with a moralised evaluation:

“The next day the mission entered the Pass of Jebel Asswad or Black Mountains - a region of dreariness and desolation. The stretch of vision was here relieved by large masses of basalt which seemed to have been upheaved in every direction by some compulsion of nature [...] This sterile district extended for more than 50 miles without even a shrub or insect to invite observation.”¹¹

Different stretches of land are represented with respect to how far they satisfy or disappoint the curious, inquiring, and judging European eye. The particular set of concerns and intentions structuring the evaluation of landscapes (in the last instance, reading them as potentially productive of exchangeable commodities), are naturalised by presenting the requisite qualities as the natural form in which geographical objects exist and appear to visual observation.

What is achieved by this mode of geographical description is the construction of geographical knowledge according to a particular visual economy, one which determines the form in which objects of knowledge will be recognised as having existence, and the forms in which subjects are

¹¹ E. Vogel, 1854, “Mission to Central Africa” *JRGS*, Vol. XXIV:281.

required to articulate their knowledge of them. This particular structure of seeing is starkly revealed in William Hilhouse's account of one of his experiences while travelling in South American:

“In describing the scenery of this creek, I feel as much at a loss with my pen as my pencil. The features are so totally dissimilar to those which are generally described as beautiful and romantic, that I can only state, whatever the cause, my chief sensation was an oppression of the senses, from which I was glad to escape. In the first place, the water of the creek, though perfectly transparent, is a deep chocolate colour; and the sands are reflected in it, of a bright claret or purple. The creek winds around in the most opposite directions; and at every turn, a large and bold spit of white sand projects, which contrasts most unpleasantly with the surrounding water. There is uniformly no middle ground for the landscape; but from the dark and still creek, with its fringe of trees, starts up, as if by magic, a perpendicular cliff, of one thousand or fifteen hundred feet; which you know is distant, but which you feel as if in your most dangerous proximity.”¹²

What is described here as ‘oppressive to the senses’ is not the actual landscape itself, but its apparent failure to conform with certain conventions of visual observation and pleasure. Hilhouse gives voice to an experience of being threatened by the character of a place, of the discomfort arising from its lack

¹² **W. Hilhouse**, 1834, “Journal of a Voyage up the Massaroory in 1831”, *JRGS*, Vol. IV:34-5.

of *visual order*. And this is directly related to the absence of a 'middle ground', the absence, that is, of a perspective. That this is described as a feeling of powerlessness indicates that there is, as Pratt suggests (1988:24-5), a relation of dominance at play in the type of description of landscape that Hilhouse would like to be able to report - clearly differentiated space, framed in terms of depth of vision, and seen from a position of distance and height. This particular landscape seems to resist subordination to such a frame of vision. This comment expresses not only a disappointment at a scene, but it articulates an unease at the inability to establish the type of command upon which the conventional judgement of satisfaction or disappointment depends.

Hilhouse's initial profession of the inadequacy of his words to the task of describing his observations is a regularly repeated complaint in this sort of geographical description. It works to divert attention away from the ways in which the visual presentation of colonial space is very much dependent upon the ways in which it is written about. The effacement of the constructive work of representation is the condition for the presentation of space as having an essentially visual existence, and thus needing to be apprehended through certain principles and practices of observation. Thus, the problem with 'monotonous' landscapes is not what they actually look like, but that they are difficult to *write* about according to the principles which determine the selection of objects and events worthy of description in this discourse. This is exemplified by a brief comment made by the Surveyor General of New South Wales, reporting on his investigation of the interior of that territory. Having

traversed a barren stretch of land, he arrives in a finely variegated country, of which he writes the following:

“A beautifully broken horizon in the south bounded plains which were puttee green, and gracefully wooded. It was no longer my hopeless task, as on the banks of the Darling, ‘to describe stagnation and delineate vacancy’.”¹³

Here, it is clear that what is frustrated by so-called ‘monotonous’ landscapes is the intention of this form of surveillance to gain command over them by rendering them up within the terms of established conventions of written landscape description. They frustrate the attempt to gain mastery by assimilating them to a familiar mode of *writing the experience of looking upon space*.

This dependence on certain ways of writing is indicated by the way in which those landscapes which are accorded positive value are described. Typically, these are those which seem to offer up a variegated, differentiated, and above all a bounded spectacle to the observer:

“At Monbacca, on the south-eastern bank of the river, is an Indian settlement. Beyond we came to some steep sandy hills, about 100ft. high, and the highest yet seen on that formation. I scrambled up them and was richly rewarded. The prospect over undulating ground extended to the south-east upwards of fifteen miles; and the number of hills of the same formation as that I stood upon, covered with dense wood, formed one of the

¹³ **Maj. T. L. Mitchell**, 1837, “Account of the recent exploring Expedition to the interior of Australia”, *JRGS*, Vol. VII:275.

finest views of woodland imaginable. Immediately below our feet the placid river spread out as a lake, and distinctly reflected the magnificent trees which margined its banks. Beyond was an immense extent of wood of every tint and hue, from the bright yellow - blossomed *Hakea* to the dark wild green of the gigantic mora. The view in the distance was closed by parallel ranges of thickly-wooded hills; behind us was an extensive savannah, with beautiful slopes, covered with verdure and clusters of trees.”¹⁴

This type of description is the form in which different places are brought under the same regime of evaluation, by emphasising the qualities of a scene which make it precisely that: a *scene* to be gazed upon. This passage stresses the depth and sweep of vision afforded from a high position, and the variety and contrast (in terms of light, colour, and between the near and far) that seem to draw the eye over the field of vision automatically. The marking of boundaries and the stress on the natural effects of framing give rise to the impression that this space exists to be looked at, to be perused by the contemplative eye whose attention it invites by virtue of its own characteristics.

The value ascribed to rich, abundant, and fecund landscapes reflects a concern with their potential fertility, the capabilities of the soil, and the opportunities to inhabit them, even if only temporarily in the course of a journey. The signs of a residual romanticism infuse the description of landscapes in the discourse of discovery, with the stress on the grandeur of

¹⁴ R. Schomburgk, 1837, “Diary of an ascent of the R. Berbice in British Guyana”, *JRGS*, Vol. VII:307.

nature. The account by Frederick Elton of his exploration of the Limpopo underlines how the production of the object of geographical knowledge as something to be looked at depends on certain ways of producing written descriptions of them. Elton describes one stretch of river in this way:

“The scenery on the Tuli is wild and striking; large baobabs, tamarind, and fig trees border the stream, and numerous rapids, and a remarkably rocky causeway near the Kraals of Masiringi, over which the river falls in a succession of cascades, and races in a boiling torrent down a deep gorge into a lovely valley (seven miles from the Shasha river), are refreshing to the eyes wearied by the eternal bush country. High blocks of reddish-coloured granite and basalt, large hornblendic rocks, and overhanging hills, crowned with bold, bare masses of granite, compose the framework of Masiringi Falls and Causeway - a wild magnificent landscape set in a framework of trees and brilliant foliage.”¹⁵

It is worth remembering that such a description, by no means unusual, is presented as part of a discourse that claims the status of establishing the objective facts about the geographies of other places. Elton’s account stresses qualities of landscape which are explicitly evaluative, and these overwhelm the more prosaic facts he recounts: ‘wildness’, ‘magnificence’, ‘brilliance’, and ‘refreshing’ qualities of landscapes are the significant features in this passage. That these characteristics are ascribed to the landscape itself indicates

¹⁵ **Capt. F. Elton**, 1872, “Journal of an Exploration of the Limpopo River”, *JRGS*, Vol. XLII:10.

that the pleasure and satisfaction that Elton derives is not peculiar to him, but would be open to all similarly placed observers. The explicit reporting of aesthetic responses to landscapes should not be thought of as peculiarities of the particular individuals describing such scenes. Rather, the very form in which such effects are registered, in a uniform vocabulary repeated across a variety of reports from different places, indicates that it is a discursive subject-position that is being occupied and proffered in this sort of account: the position of an aesthetic-epistemological subject capable of appreciating and identifying with the experience of the object which Elton's description represents. One has to occupy the same system of intelligibility to appreciate what might be meant by describing geographical features with such evaluative, essentially 'empty' adjectives.

Pratt (1988:24) notes how the abundant use of adjectival modifiers in landscape descriptions of this sort are crucial to the aestheticisation of landscapes, producing as they do sense of 'semantic density'. The attachment of adjectives to features in the landscape, not to the position of the observer, serves to project a certain structure of observation and evaluation into the landscape itself, producing the effect that the 'real' existence of this space inheres in its visual-aesthetic qualities which only the racially unmarked subject can properly appreciate. The details of impressions and experiences which also characterise this form of description indicate how the authority of such reports lies in the discursive force with which the author is able to communicate that he has 'been there'. The framed and bounded qualities of this landscape are established by describing it in such a way, and this is the

condition of the traveller being able to present his reason for being there as simply to derive the pleasure that such a scene affords (cf. Carter, 1987:235).

This emerges from a later description from Elton's report:

“Let me endeavour to describe Tolo Azime more in detail, although the attempt to do so will, I fear, be a failure. I cannot exaggerate the beauty of the *coup d'oeil*, or the natural and material features of the scene, for although much inferior to Niagra (which I have seen), or to the falls of the Limpopo in their peculiar formation and surroundings render them well worthy of a place in future African maps, and of sufficient interest and importance to repay the exertions of any future traveller who curiosity may prompt to bend his steps in this direction.”¹⁶

This passage lacks the abundance of descriptive content of the previous one, but its ‘emptiness’ succeeds in revealing the effect that the aesthetic apprehension of space has: it conjures up a scene worthy of being gazed upon by others, making this literally into an inviting landscape by virtue of the lack of any ‘content’ in its description. This accords with Carter’s (1987) argument that one of the primary effects of this sort of landscape description is to construct the meaning of space as space-to-be-travelled, observed, and reconnoitred. The construction of space as offering different sorts of ‘prospects’ - aesthetic, epistemological, and commercial - hinges upon this visualised mode of representing colonial space upon which depends the

¹⁶ Elton, 15.

communication of a sense of landscapes as abundant, fertile, pleasurable, and refreshing by virtue of their very naturalness. This logic of visualisation is evident as Elton continues his account:

“The large trees and the vivid colours of the left bank, extending to the islands and to the very verge of the falls, is in marked contrast to the barren lands, sand valleys, stunted bushes, and scattered rocks on the opposite side, where from the summit of the basaltic rocks overhanging the gorge, a magnificent perspective is obtained - the whole scene lies before you. In front of you, and on a higher level, is the perpendicular barrier over which the river leaps into space; below you thunder the waters into the chasm; far away to the left you mark the gradual descent and commencement of the gorge; while to the right abrupt and escarped rocks overshadow the circling depths of the basin; dense woods sloping gradually from its margin towards a blue range of distant hills. One of the advantages of Tole Azime is that a point of view can be obtained from which the whole panorama may be surveyed.”¹⁷

Geographical space is here constituted as a scene offered up to the sight of an observer who, occupying a position of height, is able to command in a single sweep of vision all that the landscape consists of. The dependence of this description on a point of view, which is both explicitly and implicitly figured

¹⁷ Elton, 16.

in the passage, is overwhelmed by the sense of the sheer grandeur and monumentality of nature that it achieves. This purely visual apprehension of space rests upon the flattening out of space, evacuating all temporality from it, describing it in a timeless present. This is space apprehended by a detached, static observer, commanding an immobile perceptual field. Elton's description conjures up a strictly two-dimensional scene, where space is a surface of lines, margins, colours, reflections, and light, and where vertical and horizontal extension is dependent upon the construction of a frame which provides direction to the curious eye. The openness of this landscape is presented in terms of the depth of vision, itself dependent upon written effects of enclosure. This construction of space tends to conflate what is seen, according to certain principles, with the totality of what exists spatially. There is no room in this type of description for an account of non-visual qualities of landscapes, or indeed, of other ways of seeing them which are not dependent on this fixed position. The organisation of geographical objects in a purely synchronic relation to one another which this form of representation achieves produces the position from which what is seen can be seen. In this way the position of the observer and the act of observation are both produced as absent from and independent of any particular spectacle.

Elton's description is exemplary of what Pratt (1992:202) calls "promontory descriptions", the convention in travel writing genres of the narrator standing on some high point and describing the panorama below. For Stott (1989:78), this convention is "part of an imperialist structure" whereby explorers take aerial views of the lands they are about to enter, contemplating

a scene that is made to appear as if it invites not only their gaze but also their entry into it. The 'monarch-of-all-survey' scene does not appear in quite the same form in which Pratt (1988; 1992:201-228) analyses it in the discourse under examination here: as the final, triumphant culmination of a journey of discovery, when the lake/river/falls etc. is finally found, thus rendering "momentously meaningful the act of discovery, itself practically a non-event" (1988:23-4). It occurs much more routinely, as part of the prosaic and mundane description of successive lands observed, but this only serves to demonstrate the regularity of the same tropes of description across ostensibly different idioms. Such descriptions achieve the textual equivalent of the process which Mitchell (1988:34-62) calls *enframing*: the process by which colonial power is exercised through the construction and organisation of space as a container, an abstract realm of surfaces and boundaries within which surveillance and control can be exercised. This depends upon the construction of social forms which revolve around the organisation of vision, producing the effect of the world existing as if were a picture, a scene to be gazed upon. The construction of the object of geographical knowledge within the discourse of the R.G.S., which is literally the construction of the world as a *knowable* object, follows this pattern. Space is rendered up in a form that depends for its coherence and intelligibility on the assumption of a organising eye, upon which geographical variety, colour, and extension is focused, yet which remains outside and above the actual field of vision it commands. It is worth recalling that the bulk of the knowledge disseminated by the R.G.S. through its journals in this period consisted of written text, to which cartographic

illustrations are additions, with illustrations very rare. It is this *written discourse* that establishes the existence of geographical space as existing to be looked at, irrespective of the presence and predilections of any particular individual. Accounts such as Elton's above render landscapes knowable through writing about an act which has no duration, one which is not situated within the contours of the historical geography of European expansion which actually supports it or the particular journey being reported. The subject instantiated by this sort of description is a curiously disembodied, detached 'eye'. This type of description of landscapes rests on a construction of vision whereby, as Bryson (1983:96) puts it in his discussion of the logic of the 'artistic gaze' it resembles, "the act of viewing is constructed as the removal of the dimensions of time and space, as the disappearance of the body." Time, as historically situated observation, is removed both from the act of observation, and drained from the object as well, and the visual construction of space is in this way naturalised. Vision becomes the element not so much through which space is apprehended but the only dimension in which it has any existence.

This sense of the visibility of space is an achievement of certain understandings of what landscapes offer, and how these potentials should be rendered intelligible in writing. The stress on the aesthetic qualities of landscapes and upon the grandeur and romanticism of nature; the pleasure derived from viewing open plains of rich and varied vegetation; the monumentality ascribed to the forces of nature and reflected in the actions of rivers and scale and appearance of mountains: all these themes form the staple

content of the accounts of scientific travel disseminated by the R.G.S. And they all derive from and reproduce the conventions of picturesque landscape description (cf. Carter, 1987:230-260). The function of descriptive language lies in the communication of the sense of beauty, in exciting and engaging the audience by mobilising an aesthetic rhetoric (Barthes, 1989:143). The picturesque as a convention of landscape description reconstitutes the physical landscape as a simultaneously natural and aesthetic object according to the principles of pictorial composition (Coetzee, 1988:40). This allows us to locate the function of picturesque description within the scientific discourse of the emerging geography of the mid-nineteenth century.

In order to do so, it is useful to consider a paper appearing in the *Journal* of the new Geographical Society in 1835, which takes as its concern precisely the question of the propriety of picturesque language within accounts of scientific travel. Colonel J. R. Jackson's ruminations "On the Picturesque in Books of Travel"¹⁸ assigns this form of language use the function of a necessary supplement to all scientific geographical enquiry. Like all sciences, he suggests, geography has the problem of making knowledge which is essentially "dry and uninteresting"¹⁹ attractive to a wide public. This obstacle is overcome through the manipulation of various "attractive accessories; of which the principle is picturesque description".²⁰ The picturesque is essential for engaging the curiosity, acting as an 'allurement' that leads onto the

¹⁸ Col. Jackson, 1835, "On Picturesque Description in Books of Travel", *JRGS*, Vol. V:381-7.

¹⁹ Jackson, 381.

²⁰ Jackson, 381.

subsequent rational interest in matters of fact regarding other peoples, places and customs:

“It is the flowery margins by the way-side, which invites us to the path and lures us insensibly on till we arrive at the goal, which a dreary and desolate road would have diverted us from attempting to reach.”²¹

Jackson here mobilises the very rhetoric he is defending in order to mount that defence, and in so doing gives a candid insight into how picturesque description, which alights upon and emphasises the visual characteristic of objects, actually works. What does the propriety ascribed here to the picturesque, as a necessary instrument for the articulation of geographical knowledge, imply about the composition and structure of that knowledge? For Jackson, its suitability for this purpose lies in its being able to treat all of those matters and objects which are “susceptible of being, as it were, presented to the eye through the medium of words.”²² He argues that the textual representation of the manners and customs and the landscapes of non-European peoples and places is essential, because only this enables the reader to acquire a more intimate impression of what is described, which cannot be conveyed by the visual representations of pictures, plates, and maps:

“It is the business of the text to animate the scene, to warm the landscape, to make the figures move and speak.”²³

²¹ Jackson, 381.

²² Jackson, 382.

²³ Jackson, 383.

Jackson's discussion of the picturesque thus makes explicit the way in which this form of description posits a specific subject-effect, its purpose being to enable the reader to imagine and identify with the visual scenes of other customs and other lands being reported. It is understood as working to intensify and stimulate the interest and emotions of the reader, by communicating something of the 'real' experience itself. Jackson is critical of the sloppy use of picturesque description, but this is in order to defend and specify its proper function. The type of 'moral feelings' which it is meant to communicate rest on a particular understanding of the relation between cultures and landscapes. The picturesque is not simply a means of accurately describing a landscape, but of conveying a sense of the qualities of different peoples by describing the lands they inhabit:

"It is with the description of a landscape as with music, the chief charm of both is in association. Melody is of itself agreeable to the ear, and a rich and varied landscape pleasing to the eye; but it is only when the harmony of sounds finds an echo in the feelings, and when the scenes we contemplate connect themselves in our minds with the happiness or misery of those who inhabit them, that they have any real interest."²⁴

Understood thus, the picturesque mode of description appears suited to the project of geographical enquiry situated at the head of an explicitly interventionist mission of civilisation and conversion. Jackson confirms that the typical modes of describing landscapes operate to render those spaces

²⁴ Jackson, 383.

knowable by constructing them according to specific principles of intelligibility. Bringing landscapes to “immediate presence” through “verbal pictures” works by constructing them as full of meaning, whereby physical features are represented as signs of possible cultivation or of the character of the people of such lands. The aestheticisation of landscapes is thus part of an epistemological and moralised structure of producing geographical phenomena as knowable facts, as knowledge which can be acted upon in different ways. The presentation of the picturesque by Jackson, as a necessary first moment for stimulating geographical enquiry, thus confirms that the effectivity of this mode of description lies in establishing as given the existence of space as an essentially visible object (cf. Carter, 1992:60-1). Subsequent discussions of just what constitutes scientific geography take place upon the terrain constituted by a mode of description which is openly evaluative and aestheticised, one which establishes the privilege of fixed visual observation and representation as the principles upon the truth and falsity of geographical knowledge will be decided.

If this is the effect of the type of landscape descriptions we have examined so far, then it is necessary to attend to the exclusions which this sort of representation of space effects. To approach this issue, consider the way in which the following account, of a journey in the interior of New South Wales, presents the relation between the process of travelling and the scenes observed during its course:

“Hitherto our view towards the westwards had been circumscribed by a continued chain of thinly-wooded ridges,

which had extended, northerly, parallel to the course we were daily pursuing. On reaching the latitude $29^{\circ}10'$, which we did on the 25th of the month, all the hills to the westward of our line of route terminated, and a level, open interior of vast expanse, bounded on the north and n-w. by a distant horizon, broke suddenly to our view.”²⁵

The representation of the ‘thinly-wooded ridges’ as an obstacle to the panoramic gaze again indicates the concern, here almost an anxiety, to be able to report certain sorts of views and scenes. It is the presentation of a landscape breaking suddenly into view, in an instant of revelation, that is of most interest in this passage. Beke’s account, from his travels in Abyssinia, is also animated by this momentous unveiling of what had previously been obscured:

“After a ride of little more than an hour, the ground became more irregular as we approached the low bluff end of the mountains which we had seen to the North from Arrát, on turning which the much loftier mountainous district to the N.E. presented itself to our view.”²⁶

The representation of scenes instantaneously presenting themselves to the eye works to reinforce the impression of space existing in a visual element, independently of any specific way of actually approaching it. In this ‘moment’, the actual relations determining the ‘first sight’ fade away as space is made to appear as naturally existing to-be-looked-at. The historically and socially

²⁵ **A. Cunningham**, 1832, “Brief View of the Progress of Interior Discovery in New South Wales”, *JRGS*, Vol. II:110.

²⁶ **Dr. C. T. Beke**, 1844, “Abyssinia - being a continuation of Routes in that country”, *JRGS*, Vol. XIV:3.

specific organisation of vision that animates such an account is projected upon the object itself, which is made to carry the burden of displaying itself passively for the examination of any observer.²⁷ One of the things which disappears in this 'moment' is the actuality of the journey of which it is part, the everyday activities of travelling, and the social relations that these involve. Such matters appear regularly in the accounts of scientific travel, and great length is taken to specify the difficulties and perseverance to overcome the hindrances and obstacles of 'interested', 'devious', and 'mischievous' native guides and labourers, which is the general form in which dependence on non-Europeans appears. But when it comes to the actual object of such travel, which is the observation of geographical facts, such matters have no place. A strict separation is made between the specifics of a particular journey and the facts and scenes observed in its course, the characteristics of the latter being made to seem as if they are wholly independent of any particular acts of travelling, observing, and representing them. This form of representing landscapes has a twofold significance: it constructs space as a satisfying or disappointing object in itself, thus naturalising the ascription of particular sorts of value to it; and this involves the disavowal of the actual dependence of European 'discovery' on indigenous societies in the course of 'geographical invasion'.

The discursive oscillation between narrating the practicalities of travel and the synoptic sweep of vision provided by aestheticised landscape

²⁷ This form of representation also instantiates a specifically gendered structure of seeing. Kolodny (1975), Low (1990), Stott (1989), and Torgovnick (1990:140-58), discuss sexualised representations of colonial landscapes as female, and Mulvey (1989) and Pollock (1988:50-90) discuss the sexual economy of aesthetic vision.

descriptions is crucial to the mediation of the contradictions which inhere in the discourse of discovery identified. The scientific validity of what is presented in the pages of the R.G.S.'s journals cannot be based solely on the pure individuality and uniqueness of a particular explorer's experience. It must be experience that is capable of being repeated, shared, and universalised. Yet the individual explorer is the one who has actually 'been there': a crucial dimension of the authority that his observations carry rests on recounting the particular journey that has been made. As we have already suggested above, for this particular experience to take on the required generality it must be rendered in a disembodied and universalised register. This is the function of the visual and aesthetic accounts of landscapes offering themselves up to the sight. The rhetoric of aesthetic response re-establishes the authority that is threatened by the contradictory implications of describing co-operative relationships with local populations. While these contacts are narrated in relation to the particular expeditions in question, the visual apprehension of timeless landscapes places the observer in a transcendent position from which the contingencies of the expedition are removed, making the space represented in this way available to any similarly placed viewer. As Greenfield (1991:27) notes, the rhetoric of aesthetic response enables the simultaneous representation of colonial spaces as empty and yet to be discovered alongside the reporting of routine exchanges with the inhabitants of those spaces. This rhetoric, and especially the characteristic "first white man to see" trope (28), establishes "sight as the signifier for imperial possession, in a metaphor that masks the fact one people's possession is another's dispossession." (ibid.).

The rhetoric of visual appreciation represents space as waiting-to-be-seen, and the reporting of a particular explorer's aesthetic response to any given scene amounts to a mode of personal response that is not peculiar to them alone but one which is available to any similar observer with the requisite aesthetic faculties.

This form of landscape description interweaves the aesthetic qualities of space with its potential productive value as a commodity, so that what emerges is a representation of space wholly intelligible according to specific principles of judgement. The combination of visual splendour and potential cultivatability is ably expressed by Francis Galton's report from his travels in southern Africa:

“It is difficult for me to express the delight we all felt when in the evening of the next day we suddenly emerged out of the dense and thorny coppice in which we had been journeying, and the charming corn country of Ondonga lay stretched like a sea before us. The agricultural wealth of the land, so far exceeding our most sanguine expectations, - the dense, magnificent, park-like trees, - the broad, level fields of corn interspersed with pasturage, and the orderly villages on every side, gave an appearance of diffused opulence and content, with which I know no other country that I would refer to for parallel.”²⁸

²⁸ **F. Galton**, 1852, “Recent Expedition into the Interior of South-Western Africa”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXII:151.

It would be difficult to find a finer example of the picturesque as Jackson conceived of it. Galton presents a scene of visual order, which signifies both moral stability and a potential field for the exchange of the abundant natural productions of the land. It is also important to note that this appearance of orderliness is not ascribed to human activity; human presence is represented by villages which fit into an scene of natural order and abundance. This is the final significant point with respect to this form of routine picturesque description: it ascribes any agency responsible for the fashioning of landscapes considered to have aesthetic and economic value to *natural* agency. It is a form of representation that stresses, above all, the naturalness of nature. Thus, the following report of travels amongst different peoples inhabiting the eastern coastal regions of southern Africa directly ascribes the beautiful prospects observed to the lack of human cultivation:

“Their lands are little cultivated; Cassava is the chief produce of their grounds, although the country is capable of producing anything: it resembles a park, with clusters of trees here and there, as if planted by art.”²⁹

Another account of a journey along the White Nile similarly reports on the natural abundance and fecundity of the country observed:

“The country had changed very much its aspect. Nature was without ornament, but, as it were, more majestic in the absence of man; the river was wilder, and its banks were covered with larger trees, which were no longer obstructed with brush-wood,

²⁹ Lt. Emery, 1833, “Short Account of Mombas and the neighbouring coast of Africa”, *JRGS*, Vol. III:282.

but stood in groves, amidst a rich herbage of the finest hue, as
in an English park.”³⁰

Here we see how an aesthetic apprehension and representation of space constructs the value of landscapes, as sources of visual appreciation and as sources of commodities, as a natural fact. Such value derives from no human effort, whether by the inhabitants of such territory, who are made to appear as mere shadowy figures, or by Europeans approaching landscapes with certain intentions and interests. The relationality of value is dissembled and the socially and historically situated character of producing the value of spaces and places in particular ways is erased.

Natural Abundance and Human Indolence

If the characteristic mode of representing colonial space emphasises the naturalness of landscapes, then the effects of this mode are underscored by the representations of the ways in which indigenous people inhabit their lands. Repeated accounts of the ‘indolence’ and ‘lassitude’ of natives, in so far as they imply the inadequate stewardship of land, suggest that the classic theme of the ‘lazy native’ (cf. Alatas, 1977) can be considered as a form of geographical discourse. References to the capabilities of the soil of different regions and of their potential for improvement are frequently accompanied by references to the failure of the inhabitants of those lands to realise this potential, either because of an inclination and disposition towards idleness or because of ‘bad government’. Such accounts explicitly deny the legitimacy of

³⁰ **M. Adolphe Linant**, 1832, “Journal of a Voyage on the Bahr - Abiad or White Nile”, *JRGS*, Vol. II:177.

the possession of land by indigenous peoples, by judging them to have failed in their responsibility to develop that land.

The theme of native indolence is commonly presented along with an explanation that ascribes this condition to the natural abundance of the land, which provides adequate daily subsistence with the minimum of effort. These themes are well established elements of European writings of non-European societies, which routinely contrast the apparent poverty of inhabitants of different territories with the equally apparent potential of those lands. Samuel White Baker's brief comment on one local group he encounters during his exploration of the Nile watershed manages to summarise the basic elements of this theme:

“They are extremely indolent, and instead of cultivating their beautiful soil, they are content with small patches of a wretched grain and a harvest of wild yams, which grow in abundance.”³¹

The idea that inhabitants of regions, and especially of Africa, are naturally inclined to indolence, is part of an understanding of history that stretches back at least as far as Montesquieu. It is an understanding of history, progress and the course of civilisation which is founded in a form of geographical materialism. Alfred Russel Wallace provides an exemplary account of this understanding in drawing general conclusions from his observations of social life in the islands of the Pacific. Wallace is concerned with the effects of the low prices of foodstuffs:

³¹ S. W. Baker, 1866, “Account of the Discovery of the second Great Lake of the Nile, Albert Nyanza”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXVI:7.

“This excessive cheapness of food is, contrary to what might be expected, a curse rather than a blessing. It leads to great laziness and the extreme of misery. The habit of industry not being acquired through necessity, all labour is distasteful, and the sago-eaters have, as a general rule, the most miserable of huts and the scantiest of clothing. In the western islands of the Archipeligo, where rice is the common food of the people, and where some kind of regular labour is necessary for its cultivation, there is an immediate advance in comfort, and a step upward in civilisation.”³²

Wallace’s understanding of the poverty of the ‘sago-eaters’ is premised on a unquestioned understanding of wealth, based upon material goods like forms of clothing and habitation. Wallace observes poverty, an evaluation itself arrived at according to particular standards, and explains it by reference to the immediate qualities of the natural environment, making no effort to understand any more complex set of social and natural interactions. The lesson that he draws from this example, that civilisation emerges from the necessity, imposed by nature, to undertake useful labour, is globally valid, as he continues to explain:

“This limited observation may be extended with the same results over the whole world; for it is singular fact that no civilised nation has arisen in the tropics. That rigour of nature which some thought a defect of our northern climate has under

³² A. R. Wallace, 1862, “On the Trade of the Eastern Archipelago with New Guinea and its Islands”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXII:136.

this view, been one of the acting causes in the production of our high civilisation. We may, indeed, further venture to suppose that, had the earth everywhere presented the same perennial verdure that exists in the equatorial regions, and where produced spontaneously sufficiently for the supply of men's physical wants, the human race might have remained for a far longer period in that low state of civilisation in which we still find the inhabitants of the fertile islands of the Mollaccas and New Guinea.”³³

Civilisation is understood as only arising in temperate climes, where nature does not provide abundance ‘spontaneously’, but forces men to turn to their own labour in order to provide for their wants from a nature that provides only on condition of this effort: culture emerges from cultivation. Cooley’s discussion of the differences between two tribes in Southern Africa displays the correlation of certain standards of wealth with industriousness and degrees of civilisation, which are in turn reflected in the typical physical stature of different peoples:

“The Bechuana tribes, situated in the interior, about three hundred miles north of the Gariep or Orange River, are still superior to the Amakosa in arts and civilisation [...] their superior civilisation is evident in their industry. They inhabit large towns, their houses are well-constructed and remarkable for their neatness; they cultivate the soil, and store their grain

³³ Wallace, 136.

for winter consumption. In their physiognomy also they rise a degree the Amakosa; their complexion is of a lighter brown, their features more European, and often beautiful.”³⁴

This comparison shares the same frame of reference as that which shapes the following account of the inhabitants of British Guyana. Of the character of the ‘Indian’, William Hilhouse concludes thus:

“His life is, therefore, a life of pleasure; and it is with great unwillingness that he undertakes a superfluous degree of labour, by which he relinquishes a present enjoyment for the prospect of future provision, about which he had no care. He takes no thought for the to-morrow; but this is the fault of the climate, and not of the man - as he requires no clothes, and cannot starve, so beneficent is nature to all his wants.”³⁵

Out of this sort of understanding of the relations between necessity, nature, human labour and vitality, and civilisation, there emerges a paradox that works to justify European expansion. The tropical world is understood as naturally abundant, whose full potential is just waiting to be realised. Yet because of this very quality, the people who inhabit those lands are generally unsuited, by virtue of being so thoroughly part of that nature, to the task of undertaking the necessary transformation. Thus, by a sort of ordained default, the task falls to European Man. By the specific quality of temperate nature, it

³⁴ W. D. Cooley, 1837, “A Memoir on the Civilisation of the Tribes inhabiting the Highlands near Dalagôa Bay”, *JRGS*, Vol. VII:311.

³⁵ W. Hilhouse, 1832, “Notices of the Indians settled in the Interior of British Guyana”, *JRGS*, Vol. II:230.

is he who has acquired the necessary disposition to undertake the transformation of Nature worldwide.

This conception of the relations between geography and historical progress takes on particular significance when one considers that the ostensible concern of those reporting 'geographical intelligence' to the R.G.S. about foreign lands is to establish the capabilities that different territories have in respect to establishing the flow of commodities. What is repeatedly reported is the potential for 'improvement' of land and of great 'prospects' of cultivation, but this potential most often remains dormant. The logic of a geographical mission whose primary concern is with establishing commodity *exchange* thus leads to the issue of commodity *production*: to a concern with establishing the appropriate conditions, particularly with respect to practices of human labour, to furnish the desired flow of legitimate trade.

In the geographical discourse of the mid-nineteenth century, the theme of the 'lazy native' takes on an added significance arising from the moral responsibility with which geographical science is charged in the overall effort to overcome slavery in Africa. Exemplified above all by the saintly figure of Dr. David Livingstone, the project of scientific travel in the period *after* the abolition of slavery in British territory is crucial to the refiguration of slavery in Africa as a practice emerging out of essentially savage and uncivilised customs of African societies, encouraged and exploited by unscrupulous Arab and Portuguese traders (Brantlinger, 1988:173-197). The understanding of slavery as an abomination to civilised standards of conduct is derived from a certain morality of labour which ties slavery and indolence together in a web

which serves to emphasise the type of transformation required if natural abundance is not to continue to be wasted. Charles Anderson summarises how slavery is considered to encourage sloth and indolence:

“The Botoana-Bichuanas are an idle race. The tilling of the ground, and all drudgery in general, are left to their slaves, the Bakobas and the Bushmen. Hunting, however, is a favourite pastime with them, and their only *real* occupation; the remainder of their time is passed in dancing, eating and drinking, and sleeping.”³⁶

It is not that no labour is seen to be done, but that the form in which this labour is carried out encourages a more basic general idleness and stasis, rather than encouraging effort of a ‘productive’ sort.

The expressed intention of establishing legitimate commerce runs aground on the contradictions of the humanitarian and free-trade understandings that inform this intention. At almost every turn, travellers find abundant potential unrealised by the debasing effects of ‘bad government’, slavery, and the general condition of indolence and sloth encouraged by the very fecundity of the soil. It is because indigenous peoples are too closely tied to their land, their soil, which explains their lack of industriousness. The implication is that emancipation from a benighted condition involves not just the end of slavery and the spread of Christianity, but requires that the civilising habits of fruitful labour be encouraged by ‘emancipating’ indigenous peoples from their too intimate reliance on the apparently spontaneous

³⁶ C. J. Anderson, 1855, “Explorations in South Africa, with Route from Walfich Bay to Lake Ngami, and Ascent of the Tiogé River”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXV:93.

productions of nature. The disappointment which is consistently registered at the obvious potential to expand the realms of legitimate commerce being curbed because of the customs and practices of non-European societies with respect to their stewardship of the land, indicates how the desire for free and fair exchange requires as its precondition the transformation of relations between indigenous people and their land. In the moralised discourse of geographical observation, we can see the undoing of the manifest aims of establishing trade and spreading civilisation, and the emergence of a more basic issue upon which the success of these intentions rests: the rightful possession of and authority over land. Knowledge of the basic geographical facts about the earth's surface is constructed according to a discursive economy which sees potential for commercial development in the land on the one hand, and on the other observes the inhabitants of such lands as unable or unwilling to realise this potential, a situation which is confirmed by and in turn confirms their racial and cultural backwardness.

The theme of the lazy native is an indication of a systematic misapprehension of non-familiar modes of human-environment interaction. Dr. Livingstone's observations of the habits of people inhabiting the regions around Lake Nyassa provide some insight into this:

“Perhaps the first impression one receives is that they are far from being industrious, in fact, are downright lazy. During the day, groups of men are seen lying asleep under the shady trees, and appearing to take life remarkably easy. But a little further

acquaintance modifies impressions, as it leads to the discovery that many of the sleepers work hard by night.”³⁷

This remark effectively usurps the ‘lazy native’ theme, and in so doing indicates how it rests on a failure to attend to the specifics of the types of work which different peoples are engaged in. The existence of different patterns of work is generally represented in terms of established understandings of what counts as productive activity.

This is revealed by the apparent paradox of observations regarding the general situation of idleness amongst native peoples, and the simultaneous chastisements of their customs when the extent to which women appear to carry the burden of labour is noted. The emergent bourgeois morality of the mid-Victorian period was founded upon a concern with restraint and discipline as the basis of moral standards and productive work. Responsibility for upholding personal and social morality, and values of work and discipline, was increasingly invested in women as social and ideological constructions of masculinity and femininity were reshaped.³⁸ This reshaping of gender relations around a binary opposition between the sexes is reflected in the emergence of new forms of sexual division of labour, of new differentiations in economic and political rights, separate spheres of activity, and the development of new biological sciences premised on the strict delimitation of sexual difference. Poovey (1989) argues that in the course of this complex and overdetermined restructuring, femininity was reconstructed around sexual identity. And it is

³⁷ “DR. LIVINGSTONE’S Expedition to Lake Nyassa in 1861-3”, 1863, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXIII:256.

³⁸ For further discussions, see Hall, 1992, Levy, 1991, and Nead, 1988.

thus founded upon a constitutive contradiction: the female reproductive function, which marks women as mothers and nurturers, is the source of the role ascribed to Woman as being responsible for Morality, Civilisation, and Empire itself (cf. Davin, 1978). But the exercise of this moral influence is thus made dependent on the control of an otherwise transgressive sexuality, as female sexuality outside of biological reproduction is reconstructed as essentially unproductive and disorderly (Lacquer 1986). Thus, women's sexuality is made the foundation of moral and civilised standards, and at the same time, in its unregulated form, it appears as the constant threat and greatest danger to those standards. According to such a construction of femininity, Poovey argues, it is the regulation of women, their sequestration into specific realms, which ensures the reproduction of values of restraint and discipline. It is this crystallising sexualised economy of morality and discipline that underwrites the concern of geographical explorers in this period with the sexual habits and particularly with the extent of polygamy amongst the people they encounter in their travels. Whether reported in a disapproving tone, or in a style that thinly disguises pleasure and delight, the description of scenes of ribaldry and lasciviousness, and of the general *publicity* of women in non-European societies, serves to confirm a situation of generalised lack of discipline and sexual restraint within those societies. The observation of lax moral habits of different kinds is in turn related to the laziness and apathy displayed by different peoples when it comes to the tending of their land.

It is this complex determination of the relations between gender and productive activity which animates the descriptions of women's labour. The

observation of women undertaking the cultivation of soil serves to confirm both the principle of the unsuitability of the whole group of which they are a part to properly improve their land, as well as revealing an uncivilised arrangement of relations between men and women. And it indicates that the notion of indolence and idleness is underwritten by a specifically masculinist conception of work. Charles Anderson observes that the people inhabiting the region around Lake Ngami in southern Africa live amongst a natural abundance, where soils provide the necessities of life without great human effort:

“The labour of tilling the ground, the processes of reaping, the clearing and grinding of the corn, fall almost exclusively on the women. The men lead generally an idle life at home, but show great activity in hunting and fishing.”³⁹

The actual description of the types of labour which women undertake in transforming and cultivating the products of their environment does not stop the general conclusion that nature is naturally productive. It emerges that it is not just any form of human effort to procure from the soil its potential that will be interpreted as proper and productive. Activities like hunting and fishing, the activities engaged in overwhelmingly by men, are regarded as improper and leisurely forms of activity. It is the failure of men to engage in the cultivation of soil that supports the charge that nature’s potential is being improperly stewarded:

³⁹ Anderson, 95.

“In consequence of the indolent habits of the Amakosa and Amatembou tribes, who leave the cultivation of their lands entirely to the female part of the community, while the men lead a pastoral life in attending their cattle, they are frequently deprived of the fruits of the earth, and suffer much privation in consequence.”⁴⁰

The visible existence of female labour is reinscribed as confirmation of a general inadequacy with respect to the disposition of the whole culture to undertake productive labour. Women’s appearance in the public sphere of productive work is an indication of a society or culture in which women are *out of place*, and as a consequence one in which proper modes of restraint and discipline are not exercised and enforced. A gendered conception of the relations of work and civilisation is thus one of the discursive components by which transformation of the lands occupied by indigenous societies is refigured as a lack of proper inhabitation, a failure to properly tend and improve their lands. That these arrangements might represent a different organisation of labour, and a different form of inhabiting an environment, according to different values and standards, does not enter into this way of making sense of observed activities. Instead, they are evaluated solely in terms of a comparison with European conventions of what counts as productive labour, of who should undertake it, and what form the products of such activity should take.⁴¹

⁴⁰ A. Steedman, 1835, “Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of Southern Africa”, *JRGS*, Vol. V:328.

⁴¹ Coetzee (1988:22-3) suggests that idleness is “an anthropological scandal” to European travel writers in so far as it disrupts their desire to generate data for categories and classification, because it leaves them nothing to write about. Denunciations of idleness, he

This inscription of women's labour is an example of a more general process that characterises this form of geographical discourse, which is the representation of activities which indicate that landscapes are actively transformed by human practice and inscribed with social meaning as signs that they are essentially empty, blank, and devoid of the marks of *proper* human habitation. The overwhelming impression of landscapes which are characterised by the dominance of natural forces is conditional upon effacing the ways in which the appearance of different landscapes is the product of the forms of human interaction with these environments. The fact of human populations existing in the interior of Africa could not be denied, but these populations are represented as inhabiting their lands inappropriately, and thereby simultaneously constructed as in need of the civilising attentions of European missionaries and merchants. The way in which the presence of societies and cultures is represented denies legitimacy and value to the modes of that presence. In this way, geographical knowledge manages to produce the very 'emptiness' of landscapes which it then declares itself to be in the process of filling with facts and meaning.

In order to illustrate how this practice of representation determines the grounds upon which disputes take place, it is instructive to consider James Fox Wilson's 1865 paper, which is an early example of an emerging critique of the effects of European colonialism upon the ecologies of non-European territories (Crosby, 1986; MacKenzie, 1990). The R.G.S. is one of those

argues, are often disguised attacks on forms of passive resistance. However, he also notes that the temptation to argue that work is in fact going on where there seems to be none remains very strong, and may recuperate a fundamental challenge to an entire ethics and philosophy founded upon the value of work (34-5).

institutions in which the colonial origins of Western environmentalism can be situated (Grove, 1992). The concern at the impact of colonial expansion upon natural environments emerges as part of a critique of the unregulated private capitalist interests at the forefront of expansion until the late-nineteenth century, interests whose imprint can be seen in the constant concern within geographical reportage of this time with observing potential abundance and opportunities for trade. Wilson's paper is concerned with the causes of the extension of the Kalahari desert in the wake of the severe drought experienced in the region in the early 1860s. His explanation belongs to the so-called 'desiccation theory', according to which the interior of Africa was becoming progressively more arid (cf. Grove, 1995). Wilson situates the case of the consequent increasing extent of desert very squarely within the human realm: "The human inhabitants themselves are a prime cause of the disaster."⁴² This human impact falls into two categories: the effects of private exploiters and colonists; and the impact of the indigenous population. Wilson does therefore acknowledge the active and organised intervention and transformation of the natural environment by indigenous groups. He does so from within a more complicated conception of the nature of the colonial enterprise than that which underwrites the theme of native indolence and poor stewardship of nature discussed above. The primary cause of increasing aridity is identified as the practices of cutting wood and burning grasslands associated with both indigenous and colonist activity, an explanation developed in a highly innovative theory of the relations between deforestation, decreasing moisture,

⁴² **J. F. Wilson**, 1865, "Water Supply in the Basin of the River Orange, or Gariiep, South Africa", *JRGS*, Vol. XXXV:117.

increasing temperatures, and consequently drier, warmer ground temperatures and more unstable climatic conditions. The advance of aridity is due to the “wilfullness of man”, not the “waywardness of nature”.⁴³ Wilson displays a much more sophisticated understanding of the nature of forces shaping the physical geography of an area than that which characterises the bulk of knowledge produced in the period under examination. He affirms the principle that understandings drawn from European experience are not necessarily appropriate to non-European situations. But in certain fundamental ways, this conception shares and confirms the understandings of the more impressionistic and descriptive knowledge of the time. This is made clear in his characterisation of the ‘wilfullness of man’ in terms of ‘short-sighted colonists’ and ‘ignorant natives’. If the authority of the environmental knowledge displayed by Wilson derives in no small part from the distance it takes from the more immediate concerns of private commerce, then the taking of this distance means locating knowledge squarely within the structure of the colonial state apparatuses and institutions. Wilson’s recommendation for the course of action necessary to resolve the problem he has been discussing is that British authority in the Cape territories needs to be secured all the more firmly so that the colonial authorities can enact and impose prohibitory controls to forbid the firing and felling of grasslands and woodland.⁴⁴ An alliance between a newly assertive environmental science and the colonial state is recommended in the interests of the environment itself. In the relocation of knowledge with respect to the agencies of colonial expansion

⁴³ Wilson, 119.

⁴⁴ Wilson, 126.

and control which Wilson's piece prefigures, the denial of legitimacy to indigenous people's possession and knowledge of their territories becomes more rather than less explicitly affirmed.

The responsibility which Wilson ascribes to indigenous inhabitants for the expansion of desert turns upon an axis of knowledge; it is native ignorance which is one of the causes of the process in question, while a social cause is ascribed to European responsibility (the desire for quick profit). This serves to establish knowledge as the fundamental axis around which a hierarchical differentiation between Europeans and non-Europeans turns, in this respect bearing upon the rightful possession of and responsibility for land. Nowhere does Wilson concern himself with the relations of dependence, exchange, and interaction with Europeans into which the indigenous peoples of southern Africa have long been woven by the mid-nineteenth century, and which might be expected to determine changing forms of social-environmental interaction. What is significant about Wilson's representation of indigenous practices as deriving from their ignorance is not whether this judgement is actually accurate or not, but that knowledge that is constructed as the norm according to which the legitimacy of spatial practices is determined. What becomes clear is that certain interests coalesce around the constitution of sanctioned knowledge itself, and that these are thoroughly implicated in the project of colonialism, understood as a complex process of appropriation and control of space through different practices. Wilson advocates that the rights and practices of indigenous populations should be directly curtailed through the imposition of colonial power, a move that would simultaneously confirm and

confer authority upon those groups who are identified as being in possession of the knowledge that can command environmental systems. In this way, knowledge is not merely used to 'justify' colonial expropriation, but is one of the arenas in which this process is actually undertaken. Wilson dissolves a complex reality of social and environmental relations into a simple opposition between ignorance and knowledge, thus establishing the authority of geographical science, but in so doing, the power relations at play in those relations are displaced into the constitutive structure of that knowledge itself.⁴⁵

Worlding Uninscribed Earth

Lefebvre's (1991:284) account of the production of space according to a 'logic of visualisation' insists that the historical emergence of the visual-spatial as the predominant form of spatiality is not an innocent process, but is the product of social struggle. Different ways of assigning meaning to places are never merely abstract modes of 'reading' or 'knowing' space; they are woven into specific means of living, understanding, and practically producing space (47-8). The process of evaluating and apportioning legitimacy to different forms of rendering space meaningful, which is the primary function of mid-nineteenth century geographical knowledge, takes on added significance from such a perspective. Michel de Certeau (1984:115-30) similarly argues that the stories told about space are tied to particular practical modes of inhabiting spaces. Those in a position to command and manipulate space produce 'spatial stories' of a different order from those who are in a

⁴⁵ See McGrane, 1989, for a discussion of 'Knowledge' and 'Ignorance' as modes of differentiating same and other in the nineteenth century.

subordinate position with respect to this dominating power. In the discourse under examination, we can trace the confrontation between different forms of narrating spatiality, and following Lefebvre and de Certeau we can consider these as woven into particular ways of inhabiting and appropriating socially produced space.

Sanctioned geographical knowledge as it emerges in the period under examination is constituted according to the instantiation of a distinction between what is *seen* and what is *heard*, represented as hierarchically differentiated modes of acquiring true knowledge. The R.G.S. was involved in the transformation of the world into an object recognised through various visual technologies. In this way, space is constituted as what de Certeau (1988:234) calls “legible space”, as a surface inscribed with signs of physical processes, of degrees of civilisation, or of potential cultivation. Thus the constitution of space around a certain regime of vision is tied to the privileging of specific modes of writing: space is constructed as a *textualised* object (Lefebvre, 1991:286). Apprehending the world in relation to what is seen implies an essentially ‘scriptural relation to the world’, where what is seen can be faithfully represented in writing: “the object beheld can be written - made homogenous with the linearities of stated meaning and constructed space” (de Certeau 1988:235). The emergence of a form of knowledge whose authority rests on its foundation in visual modes of apprehending the world is a process that simultaneously works to exclude certain forms of knowledge which are denied the value ascribed to vision. It is not just that non-visual and non-written forms of knowing are devalued, but that the construction of

certain knowledge as visual rests on the simultaneous construction of certain other ways of knowing as essentially *non*-visual and *non*-written. It is the production of this distinction, and its subsequent mobilisation as a principle of evaluation, that we can trace in the discourse of colonial geographic curiosity.

Fabian (1986:24) reminds us that the particular location within the range of colonial power relations which is held by the practices of scientific exploration and observation needs to be understood in relation to questions of language: "Colonial expeditions were not just a form of invasion; nor was their purpose just inspection. They were determined efforts at inscription. By putting regions on a map and native words on a list, explorers laid the first, and deepest, foundations of colonial power. By giving proof of the 'scientific' nature of their enterprise they exercised power in a most subtle form - as the power to name, to describe and to classify." The process of scientific appropriation of the non-European world by Europeans represents both a re-naming and an increasing monopolisation of the authority to be agent of this transformation. We are returned to Spivak's (1985:141) discussion to the "necessary colonist presupposition of an uninscribed earth", which is the condition for the colonialist's self-representation as agent of the 'worlding of the world' of which the process of geographical discovery is a basic form. But tensions within this pattern of understanding emerge under the strain of the effort to make colonial space appear as if it is uninscribed, empty, blank and, in one sense or other, essentially uninhabited. The force of this rhetorical effort leaves traces which allows us to delineate these tensions.

Frequent reference and judgement is passed in the accounts appearing in the *Journal* with regard to peoples who have no 'visible' form of thought, who make no use of 'symbols'; that is, who do not have a written culture. Livingstone expresses the full force of the evaluation in which such observations are presented when commenting on the lands and peoples amongst whom he has passed in his travels in southern Africa:

"Superior minds must have arisen from time to time in these regions, but ignorant of the use of letters, they have left no memorial. One never sees a grave nor a stone of remembrance set up. The very rocks are illiterate; they contain no fossils."⁴⁶

There is a correlation drawn here between the lack of a written culture, itself reason for negative evaluation, and the very condition of the land. This observation condenses the well established theme of Writing being the very condition of History. Livingstone complains at the lack not just of visible signs, but specifically of signs of the past, of 'memorials' and 'fossils'. There is an absence of any material vehicle transporting the past of this place and its people into the present. It is the lack the condition of History itself for which they are therefore condemned.

The uninscribed character of this landscape and its standing outside of history are not merely poetic fancies attached to geographical observation. They belong to a particular understanding of the physical geography of Africa itself. Many of most famous expeditions to Africa sponsored by the R.G.S in the 1850s and 1860s were intended to provide evidence which would enable

⁴⁶ Dr. David Livingstone, 1854, "Explorations into the Interior of Africa", *JRGS*, Vol. XXIV:295.

Roderick Murchison's hypotheses concerning the geological structure and history of the continent to be confirmed (Stafford 1989:156). Murchison had argued in favour of the long-term stability of the geology of Africa.⁴⁷ The condition of fossils, alluded to by Livingstone, takes on particular significance in this respect. John Kirk's observations of fossil remains examined in the Zambesi delta⁴⁸, in which he reports on the paucity of signs of the physical and human past left upon the landscape, is one of the reports taken by Murchison to confirm his theory of the great stability of the physical geography of Africa, as are the activities of Speke, Burton, Grant and others in confirming that the major rivers of the continent had their sources in the lakes and marshlands of the interior. These expeditions confirmed, in Murchison's view, that the stability of the interior of the continent was due to its not having undergone any of the "great submarine depressions"⁴⁹ that had affected Europe, Asia, and Australia. The African continent being *unmarked* by particular physical events is understood as an indication of its having remained largely *unchanged*.

The long period under which the continent had been subject only to terrestrial and atmospheric processes, which explained the character of fossil evidence, is interpreted in a particular way by Murchison, who draws an analogy between the presumed antiquity of the physical geography of the continent and the moral condition of its inhabitants. If the interior of Africa has "preserved its ancient terrestrial conditions during a very long period,

⁴⁷ **R. Murchison**, 1852, "Comparative view of Africa in Primeval and Modern Times", *JRGS*, Vol. XXII:cxxi-cxxv.

⁴⁸ **J. Kirk**, 1864, "On a Few Fossil Bones from the Alluvial Strata of the Zambesi Delta", *JRGS*, Vol. XXXIV:176.

⁴⁹ **R. Murchison**, 1863-4, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. VIII:246.

unaffected by changes except those which are dependent on atmospheric and meteoric influences"⁵⁰, then this in turn implies that "the Negro may claim as old a lineage as the Caucasian or Mongolian races."⁵¹ This remark needs to be understood in relation to Murchison's presentation of the physical geography of Africa as having undergone no significant change, this being the form in which the 'antiquity' of its geology is interpreted. To this understanding of physical processes corresponds a very specific understanding of the place of the 'Negro races' within the overall scheme of humanity. Despite their 'antiquity', they are charged with having made but small advances in civilisation, as indicated by the lack of lasting impression they are understood to have made upon the land. It is the static nature of both the physical geography and the character of indigenous societies which Murchison considers to be the conclusive lesson of African exploration:

"Now, if the unquestioned works of man should be found to be coeval with the remains of fossilised existing animals in Southern Africa, the travelled geographer, who has convinced himself of the ancient condition of its surface, must admit, however unwillingly, that although the black man is of such very remote antiquity, he has been very stationary in civilisation and in attaining the arts of life, if he be compared with the Caucasian, the Mongolian, the Red Indian of America, or even the aborigines of Polynesia."⁵²

⁵⁰ Murchison, 248.

⁵¹ Murchison, 248.

⁵² Murchison, 249.

Much the same conclusion is drawn in another of Murchison's papers on the same subject:

“We still have every reason to conclude that, in this stable continent, which has through long ages been subjected to atmospheric influences only, the negro type of mankind must be one of very high antiquity. Yet notwithstanding this antiquity, the people of that race have made slight advances in civilisation, or in the commonest arts of life, as compared not only with the people of the Caucasian type, but also with those of the Mongolian and Malayan races, or even with the Red Indian and Polynesian races.”⁵³

Here then, with respect to one of the most notable scientific contributions of nineteenth century geographical knowledge, we find repeated the tendency already noted of interpreting the physical qualities of land, soils, and even geology in relation to the lessons these provide about the degree of progress and civilisation of the inhabitants of those places. We also have here confirmation of Stafford's (1989:187) suggestion that “Murchison's views on the physical conservatism of the continent helped provide scientific ‘validity’ for the concept of Africa as a ‘lost world’ whose floral, faunal, and human inhabitants had remained for ages in the same primeval state”. This understanding of the physical geography and geology of the African continent indicates how, in the wake of Lyell's *Principles*, the expansion of geological time was one instrument for separating the time of civilised Europe from the

⁵³ R. Murchison, 1864, “On the Antiquity of the Physical geography of Inner Africa”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXIV:205.

time of other places, and how geological time functioned as one means by which to account for geographical difference within a framework of the essential unity of Man and Nature.

The production of scientific knowledge about Africa and other places produces the appearance of these places being essentially uninscribed, unmarked by the types of human *and* physical transformations which are considered the very sign of civilisation itself. Livingstone's remarks on reporting the 'discovery' of Lake Shirwa illustrate just what conception of knowledge underwrites the claims of geographical science to be uncovering previously unknown facts. He remarks that the discovery is "claimed for Dr. Kirk and myself, as Europeans who accomplished it, entirely ignorant of any information that may or may not be locked up in Portuguese archives."⁵⁴ The status of this feature as essentially unknown rests on the presence or absence of written information by Europeans referring to it. Any knowledge that the indigenous inhabitants may have in relation to it does not enter into consideration.

A good deal of effort is expended in the pages of the R.G.S.'s journals to actually ignore evidence of such indigenous knowledge. One of the self-appointed tasks of the new Society was to produce an exact and precise system of geographical classification and nomenclature as the basis requirement for delineating geographical reality. There is a concern with eradicating ambiguity and confusion in the application of names to certain features and

⁵⁴ "Extracts from the Despatches of Dr. Livingstone", 1861, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXI:267.

phenomena.⁵⁵ This principle of constructing an ordered geographical vocabulary is also a means of erasing the inscription of non-European meanings. Comment is frequently made regarding the existence of the names which indigenous groups use for different features, but these are just as routinely found wanting with regard to accuracy, reliability, and consistency. They are generally represented as lacking in clarity, and particular mention is made of the figurative qualities of such names, another sign of their inadequacy given a desire for precise and uniform naming and classification. Cooley⁵⁶, reflecting upon the inadequacy of 'native' knowledge in general, argues that the problem lies in the habit of 'untaught' people to be swayed by the first impressions of the senses, and thus 'local' names lack the required degree of abstraction and generality. "Local names", he complains, tend to be embellished with irrelevant detail, and there is often more than one name for any single feature. Consequently, they are a barrier rather than an aid to geographical science. "Comprehensive" geographical names need to transcend the limitations that are found to be bedevil the confusion of local names. This sort of treatment constructs certain forms of geographical knowledge and meaning as *non-knowledge* and *non-meaning* by negative comparison to the standards of a certain norm of clarity and precision, itself tied to a particular determination of language, and to particular practical considerations with respect to the space in question. In this way, certain understandings of spatiality and the practices with they are associated are not granted the

⁵⁵ e.g. Col. Jackson, 1834, "Hints on the Subject of Geographical Arrangement and Nomenclature", *JRGS*, Vol. IV.

⁵⁶ W. D. Cooley, 1845, "The Geography of N'yassi, or the Great Lake of Southern Africa, investigated; with an A/c. of the Overland Route from the Quanza in Angola to the Zambesi in the Government of Mozambique", *JRGS*, Vol. XV:185-235.

legitimacy of being geographical knowledge. The assumption that a uniform and fixed nomenclature which reduces ambiguity to a minimum is the basic requirement for all adequate geographical knowledge imposes strictures not only on what sort of understandings and meanings will even be considered to be intelligible as statements of knowledge and worthy of consideration in terms of their truth or falsity, but also assumes that geographical phenomena exist in such a way that they can be adequately represented by such a classification. The practical, everyday understandings that are woven into certain ways of negotiating environments are allowed to enter this discourse only so that they can speak their own inadequacy according to standards of accuracy, precision, objectivity, and clarity which are tied to practices of surveillance, control, and appropriation which are strictly antagonistic to them.

Ghost Writing

Brantlinger (1988:180) characterises exploration narratives of the nineteenth century as forms of “non-fictional quest romances in which the hero-authors struggle through enchanted, bedeviled lands towards an ostensible goal: the discovery of the Nile’s sources, the conversion of the cannibals.” This convention of representation is also gendered. An imagery of the endurance of hardships and perils in the course of penetrating unknown and mysterious regions calls into play a series of associations between colonial exploration and sexual adventure, and constructs this activity according to specific conceptions of independent and courageous masculinity (Stott, 1989). While the reports of scientific travel appearing in the journals of the R.G.S. are generally of more prosaic order, lacking the virulent heroic constructions of the full written accounts of a Burton or a Speke, they do nonetheless fashion representations of the process of scientific geographical discovery in terms of a series of episodes in which obstacles and hindrances are negotiated and overcome. As Alatas’s (1977) analysis of the ‘myth of the lazy native’ indicates, accounts of the reluctance and refusal to work by non-Europeans are best read as a sign of resistance within a situation of social conflict. This representation of relations with indigenous peoples, and the social relations within expedition parties themselves, is a means of dissembling the actual dependence of European travel on non-European labour, knowledge, and hospitality, and of thus producing the appearance of such travel as an act undertaken by and forced through to its conclusion by the independent force of will of the European traveller-scientist-missionary. The identity of the

knowledge claimed as the product of such excursions is determined by the forms in which actual dependence is represented as hindrance, and in which non-European knowledge and information actually relied upon appears only in a fashion that confirms its status as non-knowledge.⁵⁷ By alighting upon those points in the discourse of scientific discovery in which the relations of power framing the production of knowledge are dissimulated through various strategies of representation, it is possible to glimpse the complicities, resistances, and contestations that characterised the actualities of the encounter between sets of interests of disproportionate power, and perhaps to endeavour to recover the mute inscription of the resultant tensions.

An account of travel in foreign parts, no matter how prosaic or insignificant in terms of its contribution to the stock of geographical knowledge, is not complete without complaints being registered about the difficulties encountered in procuring native guides, in controlling porters, or in negotiating *hongo* with local chiefs. The inconvenience and delays caused by the 'interested', 'mischievous', and 'devious' predilections of native labourers, and the 'intractable' and 'treacherous' dispositions of local rulers, is a constant bane to Europeans engaged in the task of establishing the geographical truth. Reference to the desertion of porters and the difficulty of exerting control over their labour is common. All these typical themes are forms in which the dependence of Europeans on indigenous societies, their actual intervention within the political relations of the places they travel, and

⁵⁷ As Hulme (1986:167) observes, the misrepresentation of the conditions of interaction is a standard feature of colonial discourses. Claims that land is not cultivated and that natives behave in duplicitous and untrustworthy fashion reverse the actualities of the colonial encounter, and by so doing the "guilt of conquest [is] transferred from usurper to usurped." (168).

the internal and external relations enabling such activities appear within accounts of the course of scientific travel. They are means by which, without needing ever to be explicitly stated, the disinterested good faith of European travellers is confirmed, and they serve to firmly establish and solidify, in their very routineness and detail, the image of Africa and other 'uncivilised' territories as places riven with political instability and savagery.

Baker's account of his explorations of the watershed of the Nile indicates some of the features of this convention of representing of the actualities of such activity.⁵⁸ The actual discovery of the Albert Nyanza, and any description of strictly geographical facts, fades into insignificance as Baker concerns himself with recounting the difficulties he had to overcome in the shape of desertions and mutinies amongst his party, and various unwelcome machinations from local tribe leaders.⁵⁹ He also provides a glimpse of the relations of force which underwrite his activities:

"After seven days' march we arrived at Latooka [...] It was at this spot that my men had conspired to mutiny. At daybreak the next morning the men refused to load the camels, and broke out in open mutiny with their arms in their hands. I made a severe example of the ringleader and thus cowed some of the party, while some absconded with their arms and ammunition"⁶⁰

⁵⁸ S. W. Baker, 1866, "Account of the Discovery of the second Great Lake of the Nile, Albert Nyanza", *JRGS*, Vol. XXXVI:1-18.

⁵⁹ The discovery merits just a few lines, which follow a succinct and typical description of the 'first sight': "Suddenly, upon reaching some rising ground, the great reservoir of the Nile lay before me!" (Baker, 11).

⁶⁰ Baker, 6.

Baker complains of the difficulties caused to travellers by having to rely on certain local groups for protection from the threat of attack by others, and how this makes him vulnerable to the manipulations of local leaders. And there is always the interminable problem of reliable help:

“Every day the porters, apparently without reason, would suddenly throw their loads down, and bolt into the high grass, disappearing like so many rabbits.”⁶¹

One can only imagine at the actual course of events that led to such ‘unreasoned’ desertions, and trace in the very form in which they are reported the marks of muted resistance.

The hostility to their presence and activities experienced by travellers is generally ascribed to either the natural disposition to savagery of the offending peoples, or to the accumulated effects of the slave trade in making them wary of the attentions of Europeans. But occasionally we can identify moments in which the conflict and the stakes at the heart of such complaints are made evident. Beke recounts the trouble he encounters at the hands of his porters in the course of his travels in Abyssinia. Coming upon a river, he is obliged to unpack his luggage and equipment to enable its carriage across the water, much against his own judgement, having himself suggested the construction of a raft as a more appropriate course of action:

“this was absolutely resisted by the people, who said they *and their river* knew nothing of such things, so that I was at length obliged to desist, and to let them have their own way.”⁶²

⁶¹ Baker, 11.

⁶² Dr. C. T. Beke, “Routes from Ankobar to Dimá”, *JRGS*, Vol. XII:254.

From this it appears that at least one set of participants in the process of scientific travel were fully aware that it was a practice which involved competing claims of rightful authority to determine the appropriate forms of spatial practice. In an unusually candid admission, one traveller, having remarked at length about the ways in which he is “at the mercy of the people”⁶³ amongst whom he travels, goes on to admonish them because they consider it a service to provide information to help the scientific traveller in his honest and disinterested task. But amidst these complaints, comes a telling insight:

“It must not be forgotten that the natives understand perfectly that it is better no one should know their country - that this is the only safeguard as to their independence.”⁶⁴

Just what is at stake in the production of standards of warranted geographical knowledge could hardly be more clearly identified, even if this comment is made within a discourse that imagines itself innocent of any of the implications which are seen here to be ascribed to this knowledge by those who are being systematically excluded from it.

The foundation of the new Geographical Society of London, in 1830, coincided with the successful solution in that year of the first great geographical mystery of the European encounter with Africa, when the Lander brothers navigated the course of the Niger. The following year the new society incorporated The Association for promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts

⁶³ W. Munzinger, 1869, “Narrative of a Journey through the Afar Country”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXIX:196.

⁶⁴ Munzinger, 195.

of Africa, the institution which had pioneered African exploration, and in the figure of Mungo Park had provided the first great humanitarian martyr to the cause of 'geographical invasion'. In so doing, the R.G.S. inherited the particular array of responsibilities that white European civilisation had bestowed upon itself through the activities of bodies such as The African Association.⁶⁵ In a piece of speculative theoretical geography of the sort which flourished in the period under examination, one contemporary commentator considers the implications of the Landers' achievement.⁶⁶ The problem addressed is what light the newly established facts concerning the course of the Niger, or Quorra, throw upon the quality of the geographical knowledge inherited from figures such as Ptolemy, Herodotus and Strabo. Such comparisons and allusions to Ancient geography are not unusual in this body of work, especially with regard to the issue of the sources of Africa's great rivers, and they indicate a self-representation of modern geographical science as the inheritor and guardian of the geographical knowledge produced by the vary progenitors of Western civilisation itself. A dialogue across two millennia, undertaken in order to establish the facts about African geography, is enabled only by privileging certain conceptions of the form and order in which knowledge needs to be presented for it to be considered worthy of judgement by the standards of science. Leake draws a quite specific lesson of principle and procedure from the Landers' journey, one which reveals the

⁶⁵ See Hallett, 1964.

⁶⁶ **W. M. Leake**, 1832, "Is the Quorra, which has lately been traced to its Discharge in to the Sea, the same river Nigir of the Ancients", *JRGS*, Vol. II:1-28.

assumptions underpinning the ascription of a certain identity to ancient geography:

“The value of this discovery, and the great merit of those whose successive exertions have prepared and completed it, is the more striking, when we consider that the hydrograph of an unknown country is the most important step to a correct knowledge of its geography, and that in barborous Africa nothing short of the ocular inquiries of educated men is sufficient to produce the requisite facts. It is curious to observe how the best collectors of oral information in that country have failed in arriving at the truth as to the origin, course and termination of its rivers.”⁶⁷

This distinction between knowledge gained through direct visual observation and reported knowledge is basic to the construction of just what and who will be admitted into the arena in which geographical facts are established. It is more than simply a distinction between two modes of knowing. It is a mode of differentiating between the capacities of European and non-Europeans to contribute meaningfully to the production of geographical truth. Leake’s principle is not simply, as it may first appear, a call to only trust what one observes oneself: the geographical enterprise could not survive on such a principle, since in the nineteenth century actual experience of travel in Africa, or elsewhere, remained the reserve of just a few. It is, rather, a distinction between who can be trusted to have the adequate visual capacities, and these

⁶⁷ Leake, 1.

are denied to 'natives', whose knowledge, *through that very denial*, takes on the identity of not being 'ocular' at all but is reduced to 'hearsay'. Leake states the issue quite explicitly:

“The most intelligent natives are confused when questioned on the subject of rivers, while the generality, unable to understand the object or utility of such enquiries, can neither inform the traveller whether two streams are different rivers or part of the same.”⁶⁸

This is a common complaint: that native informants are unable to furnish consistent and unconfused information with regard to the course and direction of rivers. The failure to acquire the type of information that travellers want, a failure which we have already suggested is determined and motivated in ways rarely given credence in these accounts, is presented as confirmation of the deficiencies of 'uncivilised races' with regard to their capacity to exercise the sort of cognitive understanding and agency required by science. The testimony of indigenous inhabitants is disqualified not just because it is reported knowledge (after all, papers like Leake's are wholly based upon reports of features and phenomena that have not actually been observed by those, like him, who quite legitimately produce sanctioned knowledge using them), but because it does not accord with the principles which determine the type of knowledge pursued by geographical science. The knowledge of European travellers is considered to be reliable "ocular testimony", a notion that demands a conception of language as a medium for the effective and

⁶⁸ Leake, 12.

unambiguous communication of visual observations. The privilege accorded to 'visual' observation and to written and graphic presentation of information is a means of privileging certain sorts of reports, and certain reporters, over others. What makes a reported sight by a European more objective than a reported sight by a non-European? The discourse of geographical discovery accords intelligibility to the reports of what Europeans have *seen*, but not what they have *heard* from non-Europeans. The division between the visual and non-visual is a discursively imposed distinction, which locates the origin of knowledge within the European subject, and works to occlude the co-existence and co-dependence of European knowledge and that of indigenous groups. The difference between indigenous forms of knowing space and the standards and values animating the practice of geographical investigation by Europeans is represented in a fashion which works to construct the former as inadequate and improper. The authority and identity of sanctioned geographical knowledge as deriving from direct observation is dependent upon the construction of boundaries which distinguish objective visual scrutiny from confused and chaotic observations, and which determine the categories of people who can be agents of geographical knowledge in the process.

The presence of native testimony in the discourse of geographical discovery is framed by the rhetoric of doubt and suspicion in which it appears. The information that travellers gain from indigenous people is presented in the process of reporting on its accuracy and trustworthiness. In this way, the *practical* dependence and use of local knowledge and information is not

accorded any independent *epistemological* value. The form in which an actual reliance on indigenous knowledge is admitted serves to erase this reliance by refashioning that knowledge as a hindrance, as being a barrier to actual arrival at the truth. The use of native guides and interpreters was a matter of course in the practice of exploration. Without such knowledge and assistance the exploits of the men represented as untiringly persevering, independent, and self-denying seekers after the truth would have been impossible. It is normal practice in reports of what a traveller has observed, mapped, and measured, to add a comment reporting what has been told to him by local inhabitants about the territory he has not yet reconnoitred. This local knowledge is thus positioned to direct attention forward to lands which are yet to be actually subordinated to scientific investigation. The existence of this information entices the traveller onwards, or is reported as an encouragement to future exploration by others. If native testimony thus appears in this discourse as a lure, both in the function it plays in narrative and in practice, then it is nonetheless ascribed no independent status *as* knowledge. Beke remarks that existing knowledge of certain regions in East Africa, being entirely drawn from native sources, is therefore unreliable, since it is “subject to those defects the unsupported relations of natives of uncivilised countries always are”.⁶⁹ This comment reveals the way in which native testimony will only be ascribed any value when it is ‘supported’, that is, confirmed and articulated by Europeans. The potential for the possessive authority of European travellers to be undermined by admission of their reliance on indigenous societies is

⁶⁹ Dr. C.T. Beke, 1843, “On the Countries South of Abyssinia”, *JRGS*, Vol. XIII:254.

countered by presenting indigenous knowledge as simply awaiting authoritative confirmation by the scientific-traveller.

It is in relation to rivers, of central concern both as objects of knowledge and means of conveyance, that this denial of legitimacy to non-European informants is most consistently registered:

“In collecting geographical information from natives, the point attending with the greatest difficulty is as to the direction and course of rivers, as I have experienced not in a less degree than any other investigators.”⁷⁰

The same problem is reported by John Hanning Speke, in the paper in the *Journal* in which he claimed to have ‘settled’ the issue of the Nile sources.⁷¹

His comments indicate that what is at issue is not so much the knowledge of non-Europeans *per se*, but the form in which it is presented, which is considered an indication of its epistemological value. Speke’s written accounts of his travels are notable for the great attention they pay to his use of native information. His report starts by recounting the difficulty presented by the information acquired from Arab traders, in respect to a crucial detail in solving the puzzle of the Nile’s source:

“the Arabs, by their peculiar mode of expression, spoke of the flow of a river in the reverse manner to that which we are accustomed to speak of the direction of the current of a river”.⁷²

⁷⁰ Beke, 267.

⁷¹ Capt. J. H. Speke, 1863, “The Upper Basin of the Nile, from Inspection and Information”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXIII:322-334.

⁷² Speke, 322.

Speke goes on to recount how this caused him all sorts of confusion, because he kept taking such reports ‘literally’, forgetting the lesson he had initially learnt. He attaches a note to the above comment, which reminds the reader that “other travellers have been perplexed by this kind of phraseology when in conversation with ignorant Arabs.”⁷³ What seems to be simply a different and easily catered for mode of expression is transformed into a mark of ignorance and an obstacle to the course of exploration.

Speke’s discussion of the confusions of Arab vocabulary is one detail upon which Richard Burton subsequently attempted to refute his claims to have solved the ‘great problem’ of the ‘mysterious stream’. In his rebuttal of Speke’s ‘settlement’ of the issue, Burton questions, among many other things, Speke’s account of the reliability of Arab information. He refers to the information he gleaned from Arabs with respect to the whether Lake Tanganyika could be the source of the Nile:

“All declared (probably falsely) that they had visited it: all asserted that the Rusizi River enters into, instead of flowing from, the Tanganyika. I felt sick at heart. The African’s account of stream directions opposed to fact: seldom the Arab’s. In this point I differ totally from Capt. Speke.”⁷⁴

Burton repeats Speke’s gesture of labelling as *false* what is described as being a difference of expression. In these marginal details of a very public dispute between these two famous figures, what we can identify is the shared terrain

⁷³ Speke, 322.

⁷⁴ R. F. Burton, 1865, “On Lake Tanganyika, Ptolemy’s Western Lake-Reservoir of the Nile”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXV:4.

upon which such disputes were situated. In both confirming *and* denying the accuracy of certain examples of non-European knowledge, the general principle of uncertainty and doubt with which it is treated is reiterated, and that Burton's paper is framed around a dialogue with the 'ancients' only serves to emphasise this. While Burton and Speke disagree about just who is to be believed, they share the same habit of denying validity *as knowledge* to modes of knowing which contradict (quite literally in this case) the standards and conventions of European science. In such a dispute, over a minor but telling question, what is effected is the erasure of existing meanings and knowledge. The two arguments negate each other, confirming in the space of their disagreement only that the status of information from non-Europeans is open to considerable question and prone to confusion. Burton's paper is an affirmation that the central facts concerning the Nile, after the efforts of he and others to decide them, are now more, not less, 'unknown'. Space is cleaned of extant meanings, and is now all the more ready to be inscribed with the marks of singular Truth.

It is the form in which indigenous geographical meanings and knowledges are admitted into this discourse that is significant: on the condition of being stripped of any validity independent of European definitions of scientific truth. Such knowledge is only ever articulated *as* knowledge by Europeans, who have confirmed certain aspects of it as accurate and true. It does not appear in its own voice, but is spoken of in an idiom of ignorance and uncertainty that effectively denies its own independent existence. There is no subject-position in this discourse from which

geographical knowledge which does not accord to the standards established as 'scientific' in mid-nineteenth century Britain can be articulated. There is no room for non-Europeans as agents of science. They appear only as objects from whom certain resources, including information, might be appropriated, and thus refashioned into a new product - scientific fact. This form of representation, by which the perspective of native informants is introduced only as an objectified piece of evidence, is a staple of colonial discourses (Spivak, 1986:229). In the case under discussion here, the perspectives of native informants are presented as nothing short of conclusive evidence of their lack of suitability to act as adequate agents of geographical knowledge.

James MacQueen's report concerning information gained from one Arab and one African informant illustrates the conventions which work to (dis)qualify such information obtained from non-Europeans. The knowledge of his African informant is introduced in an exemplary way, with a description of his physical appearance:

"Thomas Wagga is of a deep black colour, but without any of the real negro countenance such as the flat nose, thick lips, etc."⁷⁵

The informant is racially marked as the preliminary to reporting his knowledge:

"He describes the general features of his own country, and of those through which he travelled, with considerable clearness; but, like every other African black, he can give no explanation

⁷⁵ J. MacQueen, 1845, "Notes on Africa", *JRGS*, Vol. XV:375.

about names of places which are known to us from other quarters, or of geographical bearings and distances, with any precision, except as from E. to W., or from rising to the setting sun, or by the sun being to the N. or the S. of the road.”⁷⁶

Such an account has the effect of establishing a significant relationship between the informant’s blackness and his likely competence when it comes to producing accurate and objective knowledge. In this passage, judgement is not simply passed on the information given, but on the capacity of the informant as an agent of knowledge. The knowledge and meanings of non-Europeans appear in this discourse only in order to enable the denial of legitimate agency to its bearers. It is through this refusal to grant agency to certain marked groups that particular ways of producing meanings and knowledge about space are excluded from the arena of sanctioned knowledge in which intelligible observations, claims, and speculations can be articulated.

A notable feature of the reports of missionaries such as Livingstone or Moffat who were involved in geographical exploration is the tendency to stage dialogues with native subjects in their reports, in which the native interlocutor is given voice by the missionary-traveller. Such dialogues, however mundane in their actual content, are always presented as carrying some wider allegorical significance. Thus, Moffat provides the following account of an exchange with Moselkatse:

“Had some conversations with Moselkatse, and tried to make him understand that the world moved, and not the sun; that the

⁷⁶ MacQueen, 375.

earth was a globe, and not a flat; that people could go round and round, and, were a hole pierced through its centre to the other side, he would find people on what would also appear to him plain or sea. He looked bewildered at these facts, for he had no idea I was deliberately telling falsehoods. I described to him the speed with which wagons travelled in England, and ships on the sea; but it seemed like multiplying words to no purpose, as it was far above his conception. He, however, freely admitted the superior wisdom of the white man, which afforded me an excellent text to explain to him the process by which the Maengerlire, as he calls them, have reached their present state of refinement and wisdom.”⁷⁷

This tale mobilises a basic convention of missionary discourse, whereby benighted natives recognise of their own volition the power of the white man’s doctrine, and welcome and invite the necessary instruction which will lead them towards salvation and civilisation.⁷⁸ Moselkatse is seen to submit freely to the superior wisdom of Moffat, in this case in the matter of the facts about geographical reality, and in this move geographical science and all that it unleashed in its wake is transformed in to a gift bestowed upon the benighted at their own request. Any trace of imposition and conflict that the production and dissemination of that knowledge might entail is erased. It is the very power of knowledge to convert which is affirmed in this parable, thus

⁷⁷ **Rev. R. Moffat**, 1856, “Visit to Moselkatse”, *JRGS*, Vol. XXVI: 97.

⁷⁸ For example, in the same report Moffat recalls that on learning of his intention to depart, Moselkatse protested with the following plea: “Do not think of going yet; you must preach the Word of God to my people, and you know they like to hear you.” (**Moffat**, 105).

reinforcing the sense of mission which underwrites the geographical enterprise of exploring 'benighted' regions.

Pratt (1992:202) observes that the typical act of 'discovery' actually "involved making one's way to the region and asking the local inhabitants if they knew of any big lakes, etc. in the area, then hiring them to take you there, whereupon with their guidance and support, you proceed to discover what they already knew." To pass this process off as the uncovering of previously unknown facts thus depends on a determined labour of representation, which leads Pratt to suggest that discovery only exists on paper. It is the way in which episodes of travel are narrated as the uncovering of previously unknown objects that constitute those episodes as 'discoveries'. The actualities of 'discovery' are laid bare by Captain James Alexander, an early and somewhat infamous contributor to the R.G.S.'s stock of knowledge about southern Africa:

"I inquired of the Hottentot guide if he knew of any bays about the mouth of the river; and he said he could take me to one. We accordingly rode south about two miles, and found a good bay (500yds. by 250) for a small craft; and a good beach at the bottom of it."⁷⁹

Alexander subsequently reports on his "discovery of a new bay"⁸⁰, which presumably was 'discovered' in much the same way as the first. If Alexander's candidness allows us to see explicitly stated the basis of geographical discovery, then it is the archetypal 'missionary of science' Dr. Livingstone

⁷⁹ "Latest Intelligence from CAPTAIN ALEXANDER", 1837, *JRGS*, Vol. XII:442.

⁸⁰ "Latest Intelligence...", 443.

who provides a fine example of the discursive erasure of landscapes as the necessary prelude to their imminent discovery. In discussing the generally confused quality of information gained from Arab and African informants, he remarks in the following way upon a meeting with two Arab traders well acquainted with the African interior:

“They drew Nyassa discharging towards the south, and Tanganyika towards the north, which last we know from Major Burton to be nonsense. They reported another lake, called Meolo, and say the Loapola flows into it. I wonder who will be set down as the discoverer of that after the English have been there.”⁸¹

Once again, evidence of prior knowledge of geographical phenomena is admitted only in a fashion in which it is found to be wanting, to be in this case nothing short of ‘nonsense’. It is thus made to conform to the essentially unscripted character of the landscape which allows the practice of scientific travel to be textualised as the worlding of the world. The unknown quality of African geography is asserted not only in spite of the existence of non-European knowledge, but this condition is in fact further confirmed by the very way such knowledge is represented as a sign of a fundamental ignorance.

Dr. Andrew Smith’s account of his expedition into central Africa in the late 1830s displays this complex reinscription of knowledge as non-knowledge. Smith repeatedly notes his reliance upon native sources for information regarding sources of water, warnings of possible risks, and as

⁸¹ “DR. LIVINGSTONE’S Expedition to Lake Nyassa in 1861-3”, 1863, *JRGS*, Vol. XXXIII:264.

guides to the future direction of his explorations. At one point he remarks that his party had travelled for three days without seeing any trace of natives. The significance of this is made quite clear:

“This occurrence led us to fear that one of the most desirable sources of information was now out of reach.”⁸²

Despite this frank admission, when Smith does come to relate his interactions with native informants, this dependence is refigured in the fashion already suggested. The natives take on the appearance of obstacles and hindrances to the otherwise smooth process of discovery. Smith recounts that “direct questions are often not well calculated to elicit the truth from savages.”⁸³ He reports that while staying at one settlement, he learns from the inhabitants of a very large, fresh water lake some distance to the north. Suitably excited by the prospect of discovering this lake, what follows is an account of how this intention is thwarted because of the inability of the people who know of the lake to provide him with the sort of information he wants about it, and especially about how to get there:

“The statements made in regard to the lake were vague and unsatisfactory on every point, except as to its existence, - on that no discrepancy occurred, - the appearances of the water during stormy weather were so naturally detailed, and the form of boats, and the method of making them ‘walk’, so minutely and clearly described, as proved at once that all must have

⁸² Dr. A. Smith, 1836, “Report of the Expedition for exploring Central Africa”, *JRGS*, Vol. VI:408.

⁸³ Smith, 409.

actually seen what they attempted to picture. On the subject of the direction and distance, little could be ascertained with certainty, - some stated it bore n-w from us, others n-e: some that they could reach it in three weeks, others that it would require 3 months. If it be kept in view that almost no two of our informants reached it from the same place, and perhaps not one without wandering and halting amongst the intermediate tribes, it will be evident that none of them were fitted to form a correct estimate either of the actual distance or direction.”⁸⁴

Once again, it is against particular standards of objective and measurably accurate knowledge which native information is evaluated and found wanting. The lake itself begins to take on a sort of ghostly existence from such an account, appearing as a feature barely discernible upon the landscape. Native informants are represented as being unable to describe the geography of their own land with precision. The task of full and proper description falls to the travelling scientist, who can thus present his act as an originary inscription of meaning. But what Smith declares to be inadequate cognitive capacities on the part of his informants might be re-read in a different light. It is a common complaint of travellers that different individuals describe the features of the same object in a host of contradictory and confused ways. Smith, in repeating the complaint, actually includes in his remarks some indication that what is being described to him are each particular informant's own experiences of travelling to and from the lake in question, tied to specific activities not

⁸⁴ Smith, 409.

immediately concerned with elucidating its precise outline and position. He wants a uniform account of the lake treated as an object, independently of any specific mode of social practice out of which knowledge of it is woven. Smith complains that his informants seem unable to separate the description of the lake from the particular set of movements, operations, and actions upon which their knowledge of it is based. Given the traces of certain translation difficulties ('direct questions' not being particularly productive), we can only guess at the precise situational factors that determined this lack of fit between what Smith wants to get and what he actually receives by way of geographical information. But what we can identify with certainty is the representation of this lack of fit in terms of a cognitive inadequacy on behalf of the people providing him with their knowledge. No room is left either for the possibility of misunderstanding, or more significantly, the possibility that what Smith hears is not confusion and ignorance but a different form of knowing tied to different requirements and different forms of inhabiting and producing space. This knowledge is assimilated within the framework of European understandings, and found wanting by those standards. It is only by evaluating such information in terms of how far it does or does not accord to the same principles of intelligibility, representation, and action as those structuring European geographical science that it is found to be marked by ignorance, and is thus constructed as the other of that science. The subordination of non-European meanings and knowledge is written into the very form in which the existence of that knowledge is allowed to appear in this discourse, as a practical dependence is simultaneously acknowledged and disavowed.

The task of geography in this period was to establish *what is*. Such a project implies a strict delimitation of reality on the one hand, which is what geography was concerned with, and magical, superstitious, and imaginative conceptions on the other. This *a priori* distinction structures the following description of the accounts provided by one group of indigenous inhabitants:

“The country, though in reality exceedingly poor, is rich in their imagination. The belief in the existence of precious stones in general, and is connected with their faith in the supernatural, which produces things foreign to the nature of their country.”⁸⁵

The appearance of native conceptions is here already preceded by the presumption that ‘reality’ has already been securely delimited, which allows this knowledge to be evaluated with regard to how far it diverges from the standards of realistic, factual geography. The denial of intelligibility and reality to the geographies implied by certain ways of narrating space and inscribing geographical meaning is the task undertaken by mid-nineteenth century geographical science. Fabulous and mythical conceptions are constructed as fictive and imaginative, and in this way the appearance of the brute reality of the sanctioned geographical facts by the R.G.S. is secured. Alexander recounts one stay in a native settlement in the following fashion:

“I hear strange tales of mountains north of this, composed entirely of iron, of giants, with feet as broad as elephants; and who are strong enough to carry off an ostrich on their shoulders; of two-legged serpents of great size, which pursue

⁸⁵ Munzinger, 195.

women, and kill half a dozen camels at once; of wild horses living in the hills of the interior, with one horn on their forehead, &c. Doubtless, if, by the Divine favour, we are spared, we shall see much, though not a phoenix or such wonders as the above.”⁸⁶

The dependence on local information, which the same author explicitly figures elsewhere as we have seen, is here refashioned into a mocking and somewhat laboured parody which amounts to the dismissal of the sort of geographical reality which might have been contained in the information provided to Alexander. His clear intention to travel to the territory in question is thus separated from any relation of dependence on the indigenous population, and is made to appear instead as a necessary advance of rationality into lands yet to be subjected to the disciplines of accurate observation. The unintelligibility of native geographical knowledge in any terms other than those which elicit incredulity and amusement is affirmed by this mode of including it in the discourse of geographical science.

The apparently fabulous conceptions of indigenous groups are always already refashioned as unreal, and they appear only in order to underline the insufficiencies of indigenous ways of apprehending geographical reality. Indigenous knowledge is consistently presented in ways which confirm the inadequacies of certain groups as potential agents of accurate geographical fact. James Grant’s remarks on a trader, Jooma, and his reaction to Mount Kilimanjaro, illustrate this process:

⁸⁶ “Latest Intelligence...”, 444.

“He described the changes in colour in the mountain, but not knowing what a snow-capped mountain meant, he did not understand that snow could produce this difference of appearance in tint - white, black, green, brown, and scarlet successively, if viewed between the times of daybreak and darkness. He believed all this was supernatural, for he became ill when he wished to ascend it, and said every black man was affected by it; though white men, if like Speke, might not be so [...] Poor “Jooma” was full of superstitions.”⁸⁷

It seems that anything other than a representation which is an accurate explanation is worthy of being dismissed. In this move, in a strategy we have already noted, the native subject is made to pronounce the superiority of the white man’s knowledge, and in this case, this appears to bear directly on the right to command the mountain as well. In submitting to the superiority of the white man on the grounds of knowledge, the symbolic possession of the mountain is also ceded by the subordinate to his superior, in the shape of Speke. The identification of a clear and precise grasp on real geographical facts with rightful possession of territory is made starkly evident here, and the process of appropriation which this implies is disguised by having the relation stated by the native informant himself (cf. Pietz, 1987:273-4).

Grant’s discussion of the ways in which Speke dealt with ‘collateral information’ gained from inhabitants encountered in the course of travelling is noteworthy because it reveals the ways in which indigenous information was

⁸⁷ Grant, 257.

practically translated into the idioms of sanctioned geographical knowledge, simultaneously denying legitimacy to the practices and agents of such information. Speke's folly, one of the characteristics of his reports and narratives exploited by his critics, is the openness with which he figures his reliance upon native information. This should not lead us to consider Speke a more enlightened traveller than others, since the full written accounts of his exploits amount to little more than the sustained and virulent ideology of racial superiority. Nonetheless, Speke's much disputed claim to have settled the question of the Nile's source, and particularly the map he constructed in support of his claim, rested in no small part upon the conditional validity he ascribed to native information. He asserts that his map serves "to show what power of knowledge an explorer can possess himself of by local information."⁸⁸ Grant's subsequent account reveals just what sort of operation, and just what sort of relations of subordination, were involved in this process by which the European traveller appropriated to himself the knowledge of others.

The stripping of agency from certain groups which, it has been argued, is the particular effect of the way in which indigenous knowledge is deployed in geographical discourse can be seen clearly in Grant's discussion. The practical reliance on such information is revealed at the same time as its representation in discourse is seen to efface its status as knowledge. Grant, referring to their sojourn in the area of the Victoria Nyanza, goes to some length to explain Speke's methods of 'interrogating' his informants:

⁸⁸ Speke, 326.

“Here, and in every other territory we passed through, have I seen Speke, compass in hand, with native travellers around him, getting from them the positions of Uganda, Unyoro, Ujiji, Ukereweh, Luka Nzige, Victoria Nyanza, Usoga, Ugani, or places we had never seen, and hearing from them the descriptions of the races around the lake. In fact, we never met a traveller of any intelligence who was not put through the points of the compass in this way; but none of those who lived on the western shore of the lake could ever tell us who lived on the opposite shore. As we changed ground from camp to camp, going northwards, Speke, by following this system of observation and native interrogation, was able to secure cross-bearings of all the countries which appear in his map. And as far as we inspected afterwards, these cross-bearings were wonderfully near the truth; for this reason I predict that what we were unable to procure by inspection will be found equally accurate. In one instance, this is already confirmed. Speke laid down the Luta Nzige lake entirely from native information: it was afterwards visited by Sir Samuel Baker, and its northern extremity had not been altered from Speke’s map; and the southern end has yet to be visited before it can be shown that Speke accepted wrong bearings. This case I instance to prove that when information is properly sifted and obtained from

natives of the upper and intelligent class, it is decidedly reliable.”⁸⁹

This account certainly throws into perspective those more simple claims about the unreliability and confused nature of native information, but in indicating that such data was practically appropriated and made use of, it confirms the argument thus far pursued. A labour of transformation of native information is undertaken before it is allowed to appear as knowledge, open to scientific verification and refutation. And this transformation, the details of which are graphically laid bare here by Grant, transfers the authority of acting as the agent of knowledge to the racially unmarked scientific-traveller. It is he who is equipped with the necessary abilities to filter and refine into actual knowledge information which, outside of this process of transformation, remains just so much native confusion. The process of making actual use of such information is indeed, in its very practicalities as described above, a form of appropriation. In this process of transformation, knowledge is translated into new idioms over which certain identifiable groups maintain a monopoly. In this way, any admission of the positive contribution of native knowledges and meanings is made dependent on erasing the identity of that knowledge and information as belonging to different ways of understanding and practising space. What is different is granted legitimacy only on condition of being remade in the negative image of the same. In turn, the identity of sanctioned knowledge is secured by the return of the residue of this transformation: the knowledge which, when properly sifted, can be made good use of, is made to reappear in

⁸⁹ Grant, 256-257.

its raw state to confirm the inadequacies of those who are its 'natural' bearers. In both cases, the positions of non-Europeans as agents capable of producing knowledge are systematically effaced. Articulation of knowledge is reserved for subjects marked with the signs of civilisation. Such is the conceit of colonial geographical knowledge

The lasting achievement of the geographical discourse of the mid-nineteenth century R.G.S. is to provide overwhelming evidence of the relations through which the geographical knowledge it pioneered was constituted. The discursive effacement of non-European agency in the production of knowledge secures for the new geographical science the authority which comes from being aligned with an apparently self-generating tradition of European science, which reserves to itself the privilege of rationality and reflection which elevates its knowledge to the level of universality. The 'archive' which is its published knowledge is a record of its contribution to the production of certain forms of spatiality, and a testament to how this involved the suppression of certain others. The contested quality of this geographical knowledge is not to be located in disputes over different versions of the truth, the precise location of particular features, the sources of rivers, or in just what constituted properly 'scientific' geography. And it certainly does not take the form of a conversation. It is instead marked in the interstices of its discourse in mute form, for the contest is about the power and the right to articulate words and meanings, and consequently some of the contestants are never heard from. This silencing of certain words, and the erasure of certain meanings, is the lasting accomplishment of the R.G.S. in the

period under examination. But the strains and tensions of the labour which this entails leave their traces, and this enables us to sketch the possibilities of alternative ways of practising knowledge yet to come.

CONCLUSION

“I have nothing to say, only to add”

Gore Vidal

The originally anticipated shape of this work has been subjected to revisions and modifications which render the final product a palimpsest of writings, erasures, and re-writings. While chapters 5 and 6 are informed by particular theoretical concerns, the accounts provided of these theories in chapters 2, 3, and 4 are informed by the actual practice of archival reading which they appear to direct. The linear presentation of chapters from ‘theory’ to ‘practice’ is not, then, a reflection of the movement of my own learning in the course of writing this dissertation, which has never been quite as orderly nor as focused as this would suggest.

One constant theme, nonetheless, has been reading. The approach to reading sketched in the previous pages has been guided by a suspicion of hermeneutic-interpretative protocols and their attendant values of community, identity, and unity. Rather than presume to return texts to their source in history or individual intention, the work of reading elucidated here has been one which endeavours to inhabit and repeat the texture of discourses in order to expose them to the dislocating energy of the irreconcilable elements within them. The sort of reading-work I have re-written here is best captured by the axiom that “reading is giving yourself up, not standing at a distance and jeering.” (Coetzee, 1994:46). The peculiar and discomfiting familiarity, to this reader anyway, of the discourse of nineteenth century geographical

discovery called for a reflection on the form of criticism to which this discourse was liable. I was already given up to the discourse encountered in my chosen archive, and this (re)discovery required a mode of judgement that did not disavow complicity in order to sit in dismissive judgement, but one which worked through complicity to open that discourse up to the traces of possible other readings marked within it.

As I argued in chapter 1, the particular significance to be drawn from attending to past forms of organising geographical knowledge lies in the light it might throw upon the operations and effects by which the modern disciplining of knowledge works. Thus, if there is a line of communication between my own reading of a century-old archive and contemporary concerns, it lies in the shared context of a set of questions about who gets to speak as an agent of knowledge, what gets to be spoken of, and what forms of legitimacy are underwritten and underwrite these arrangements. As I suggested at the outset, the R.G.S.'s published knowledge presented an opportunity to practice with a range of new and exciting difficult theory drawn from an interdisciplinary field. One outcome of this appropriation has been the identification of the same patterns of representation that have been found in other arenas where colonial discourses have been analysed. On the reading produced in chapters 5 and 6, it would appear that geography was part of the field of discourses and representations which laid down a series of tropes and themes which have since been recirculated, a field which continues to inform a range of contemporary popular cultural forms and which is above all characterised by the discursive dispossession of subaltern groups of their

“authority over knowledge and identity.” (Shohat, 1991:41). But more generally, this demonstration of the efficacy on geographical knowledge of a range of theoretical work on language, reading, and representation has confirmed that language and representation are crucial to the institutionalisation of knowledge. This was the argument made in chapter 2 in particular: that theories of colonial discourse and subaltern representation had a significance that stretched beyond the specific fields of study where such matters are the subject of research, a significance that impinges upon questions of institutionality itself. That cultural theory has displayed such an interdisciplinary attraction is not simply because ‘cultural’ matters are recognised as being of importance and worthy of attention. Rather, as Robbins (1988) argues, the attraction of such theory, and especially of theories of representation and language drawn from literary studies, lies in their making available resources with which the claims of objectivity and authority which underwrite various disciplines can be called into question. Language is the site upon which identities and differences are worked up and stabilised, and the institutionalisation of legitimate authority through the ascription of differences therefore works not least through the organisation of patterns of language-use in different institutional locations.

As suggested in chapter 2, one of the most important impacts of so-called post-colonial theory has been to challenge the widespread and taken for granted assumptions that would present Western history, cultural traditions, and societies as homogenous and unified entities which are the unique sources of their own identity. I have extended this critique into an analysis of the

discourse of the nascent geographical science of early and mid Victorian Britain in order to show that the persistent denial of mutuality, contact, and interaction by Europeans with respect to other societies is an effort that leaves a strain on the discourse in which it is asserted. If the contemporary critique of global asymmetries of power requires the interrogation of the ways in which contemporary forms of knowledge continue to invest in imperialist and colonialist modes of authority and conceptualisation, then one important lesson of my reading of the archive of geographical discovery has been to find therein the traces which establish that this most European of sciences was always a hybrid and syncretic product of both acknowledged and unacknowledged agents. The space-clearing operation of critique therefore works to uncover an alternative space, an expanded field of reciprocity covered over in the retrospective re-writing of the actualities of geographical expeditions in a genre of heroic 'discovery'. The self-appointed mission of the R.G.S. from its foundation was the dual task of the *acquisition* and *dissemination* of geographical knowledge; my reading suggests that in the practical execution of this task, as mediated by the public discourse of the Society, a narrowing and monopolisation of agency over knowledge took place, as a re-writing was undertaken by which the authority and legitimacy of non-European knowledges and meanings was denied so that the R.G.S. and its agents took on the appearance of an army of scientists blessed with Adamic powers to name the world into existence. Non-European subjects and their knowledges are presented within this discourse as the confusion or noise against which European science takes shape and secures its authority.

Sanctioned knowledge constituted itself against other forms of knowledge not simply by exclusion, but by constituting the excluded as such by including it as excluded. The closure of the field of sanctioned geographical knowledge around the boundaries of a Eurocentric community thus encloses its outside on the inside. I have endeavoured to mobilise the disruptive potential of the traces of other ways of knowing in order to sketch the outlines of the authority relations by which the sanctioned, disciplined knowledge of nineteenth century geographical science was worked up and secured at the level of its written published knowledge.

The question arises as to what sort of critical purchase is claimed for the readings presented in chapters 5 and 6. By suspending the authority of the discourse in question, I have identified the textual traces of the subordination of *subjugated knowledges* which was instrumental to the course of European imperialism. While it is thus possible to recreate the antagonistic and dialogical field which shaped this geographical knowledge, I have not presumed to recuperate or 'emancipate' the subordinated voices - they are not there to be emancipated, not in this archive at least. What I have attempted to do is to locate in this discourse, one irredeemably complicit in the epistemic and real violence of colonialism and imperialism, a 'post-colonial' promise. The sense of 'post-colonial' here follows Slemon (1990), who argues that an anti- or post-colonial counter-discursive purchase subsists in colonialist cultures "from the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body of its Others", a critical purchase which is not autonomous of but co-exists with the hegemonic discourse, and which is "never fully present as

unmediated resistance.” (3). In order to rearticulate the “memory of hostile encounters” (Foucault, 1980) which makes up the dialogic context of the discourse of geographical discovery, and to mark the post-colonial promise which is inscribed in its interstices, I argued for the need to pursue a mode of reading that endeavoured as far as possible to repeat the pattern of discursive interpellations of the textual archive in order to open it up to its own internal dissonances. Such a reading alights upon those moments in the text when the presence of other ways of practising space and producing meaning are registered sufficiently in the archive of the colonial encounter to enable us to recognise the existence and force of a resisting presence.

The discourse of the R.G.S. examined here can, then, be characterised as being framed by the rhetorical figure of preterition, the figure by which passing and summary mention is made of something in the moment of professing to omit it. Accordingly, subjugated geographical knowledges are mentioned in being passed over in favour of the legitimate knowledge and authority of European science. Such passing reference indicates an ellipsis in the textual archive, the place where words and voices that would complete the tale are found to be absent, and this ellipsis is the gap which might be prised open in order to read the archive otherwise than was intended. The authority of the discourse of geographical discovery is undermined by its having to state as such the non-elect status of other agents of knowledge. Following Berubé (1992:224), this discourse of preterition is recuperated and reinscribed for the purpose of ‘historical redialogisation’, in order to restore the apparently

autonomous discourse of geographical discovery to its rightful place in an antagonistic field of competing and differentially empowered discourses.

The purpose of re-writing such a discourse is not to make of the non-elect the elect, not to valorise an idealised and authentic marginality. It is, rather, to displace centre/margin models of identity and power by insisting on more complex imbrications of societies and cultures. Let me elaborate by considering one of the most consistent sources through which relations of colonialism, resistance, and culture have been thematised, namely Shakespeare's *Tempest*, which can usefully serve as an allegory of the reading undertaken here of the discourse of the R.G.S. Prospero and Caliban are the archetypal coloniser/colonised dyad. The preferred reading of Caliban as a savage immersed in Nature works to justify Prospero's appropriation and his monopolisation of legitimate authority over language. Caliban is condemned to either remain silent, or to act as a passive dupe whose future is shaped by conceptual field of Prospero's language. Such a manichean representation underwrites the nativist longing for a return to authentic culture unsullied by contamination by the alien culture imposed by imperialism (cf. Appiah, 1988). But there is the possibility of reading the Prospero-Caliban relation otherwise, by recognising Caliban as the bearer of another culture, one unfamiliar to Prospero and subsequently denied by him. Rather than affirming the dilemmas that follow from accepting that language is Prospero's gift to give, one might read against this dominant theme those moments in which the memories of communication across differences and before shared language is articulated by Caliban:

“This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother,
 Which thou tak’st from me. When thou cam’st first,
 Thou strok’st me and made much of me; wouldst give me
 Water with berries in’t, and teach me how
 To name the bigger light and how the less,
 That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,
 And showed thee all the qualities o’th’ isle,
 The fresh springs, brine pits, barren places and fertile -
 Cursed be that I did so! All the charms
 Of Sycorax, toads and beetles, bats light on you!
 For I am all the subjects that you have,
 Which first was mine own king, and here you sty me
 In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
 The rest o’th’ island.”

(William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 1.2, 330-344)

Caliban possessed the knowledge of the island’s geography, a knowledge shared with the newcomer. Caliban’s accusation is thus also a recollection of a moment of first contact when there was opened up a *space between* in and through which he and Prospero communicated (cf. Taussig, 1993). And the medium of this communication was Nature itself: “A shared nature *as* language - as a fruitful ecology of communication - was, thus, subjected to usurpation by men who refused to brook difference.” (Baker, 1986:193).

This, then, is the pattern of significances found in the discourse of geographical discovery: a level at which knowledge is claimed as the

monopoly of only one party, and taken in turn to confer rights of possession over territory; and a level at which this theme is revealed to be a retrospective re-writing of an encounter in which relations of communication between cultures took place, the evidence of which survives despite the efforts to erase them. This in turn suggests that prior to language as a medium of accurate representation and as the vehicle of knowledge, there is language as the very site wherein difference is articulated and maintained: language as the place wherein affirmation of alterity and the commitment to dialogue resides, an affirmation and commitment that exceeds any conscious decision but calls forth responsibility and response:

“before and beyond all theoretico-constatives, opening, embracing, or including them, there is the affirmation of language, the “I am addressing you, and I commit myself, in this language here; listen how I speak in my language, me, and you can speak to me in your language; we must hear each other, we must get along.” (Derrida, 1992:60-1).

It is this *ethical* dimension of language as discourse which enables us to contemplate a reading of the colonial archive which will recover from it the memory of other ways of articulating difference. A disruptive reading which makes the ontological dimension of language answer to its ethical substratum endeavours to re-open the gap between the saying and the said of discourse (cf. Lévinas, 1987:102-3). To release the force of this irreducible ethical energy which inheres in all language, one must displace the authority of the subject of knowledge who would deny mutuality and difference. As argued in

chapter 4, securing the obviousness of a given discourse requires suturing the subject of statements and the historically situated subject of enunciation, and this achievement only ever goes on in and through an institutional space. The production of meaning thus presupposes passing through what Bhabha (1994:36) calls the Third Space:

“The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot ‘in itself’ be conscious.”

The conditionality of meaning, of the obviousness of an object-world and of subject-positions from which it can be apprehended, on institutionalisation ensures that meaning and significance do not have any final fixity. Signs and marks might always be reinscribed into different institutional spaces, their conditions of articulation inflected in new directions, enabling the unsaying of the said of their discourse. This is the claim upon which I must rest the readings undertaken in chapters 5 and 6: to have interrupted the discourse of geographical discovery by recontextualising it, making it pass through an institutional space in which contemporary cultural theories of language and representation can open up its content to new significances. The purpose of so doing is finally rather modest: I hope to have shown that particular models of agency and representations of space rest upon the delimitation of particular understandings of writing, language, and representation. In particular, the

work of reading elucidated in chapters 2, 3, and 4, and pursued in chapters 5 and 6, is one which suspends the referential apparatus upon which geographical knowledge in particular depends, in order to ask a series of questions about what sort of conditions, particularly what sorts of subjectivities, would need to be institutionalised and accepted for such discourse to be received and circulated as legitimate and objective knowledge.

To suggest that the discourse of nineteenth century geographical discovery secretes within itself and despite itself the traces of alternative possibilities of representing difference and identity is perhaps an unlikely conclusion, but nonetheless an important affirmation. To find in even this discourse evidence of alternative possibilities not realised is to affirm that responsibility comes before intentionality. By opening this discourse up to the traces of alterity within it, the possibility of an expanded space of call and response is demonstrated as a condition of all discourse. This possibility of a space where difference is the condition of alternative arrangements of being-in-common need not be posited as an ideal situation, but is affirmed as a concrete possibility which conditions even those practices which loudly disavow it.

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