



History and philosophy of geography 2004–2005: biographies, practices, sites

Charles W.J. Withers*

Institute of Geography, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9XP, UK

I Introduction

Three themes loosely structure this review of recent work in the field: biography, practice, and the sites of geography's making, often in national context. There are, of course, connections between them and, for the first noted, important links too with that biographical work signalled to in an earlier review (Withers, 2006: 83–84). Whether the prominence of this theme in particular signals the emergence or even re-emergence of a critical 'biographical turn' in the history and philosophy of geography is hard to say – certainly, there has never not been such a theme – but its prevalence is noteworthy nonetheless. It is prompted in part by an enduring concern to mark the work of significant contributors to the enterprise that is and has been human geography, however and wherever understood. Yet, as some of the studies discussed below note, individual achievements were often made in opposition to prevailing disciplinary trends. Recounting distinguished lives and commemorating significance is not the same thing at all as discerning either the

historical and present contours of geography as a discipline or of accounting for the practices by which geographical knowledge came at different moments to be legitimized.

II Geography and (meta)biography

In marking the institution of a new and occasional series on 'Makers of modern human geography' and beginning it with Torsten Hägerstrand (1916–2004), we are told that 'The contributions of some individuals ... have been so multifaceted that they deserve extended treatment through a series of linked memoirs rather than a single essay' (Johnston, 2005: 328). Allan Pred acknowledges Hägerstrand's influence upon him, his 'stunning originality and unconventional creativity', in a short account of a rich life-path Pred compares to that of Walter Benjamin (Pred, 2005). No less engagingly, Richard Morrill places Hägerstrand in the van of the 'quantitative revolution', seeing the latter's work in spatial diffusion, space-time processes and spatial modelling from the late 1950s onwards as having 'revolutionary'

*Email: c.w.j.withers@ed.ac.uk

impact in human geography, notably in its significance for reproducing, in a number of ways, 'the historical geography of the landscape, including individual variability' (Morrill, 2005: 335). Thrift accords a prescience to Hägerstrand the Social Theorist, seeing his work on time geography to offer, still, rather more than was taken from it – in a related publication, he pays his own debt to just that project (Glennie and Thrift, 2005) – and acknowledging Hägerstrand's vibrant legacy in a variety of authors and artists (Thrift, 2005a). For Öberg, the focus is Hägerstrand's influence on planning in Sweden, his legacy there as readily apparent in what his pupils did as in what he himself achieved (Öberg, 2005).

Just how many Hägerstrands were there? The question is not as silly as might first appear for the significance of geography's makers is likely always to be multiple, varied and open to reinterpretation. At least, I would hope this to be so. In this regard, biography in geography's history and philosophy is not necessarily about fixity but is always – or always *should* be – about the present and future purposes being served by remembrance and the differences and contradictions that constitute a life (leave alone the difficulties of reconstituting life-paths after death). Numerous other biographical accounts have appeared of late: of Homer Aschmann, not as widely known perhaps as his scholarship and painstaking fieldwork merited (Pasqualetti, 2005); of men like Peter Gould and Paul Wheatley whose many lives and works would certainly warrant further attention (Haggett, 2005; Dahmann and Berry, 2005), and of others – Lucien Gallois (Clout, 2005a), Edward Lhwyd (Thomas, 2005), James Playfair (Withers, 2005a), the Cuban father and son Felipe and Andrés Poey (Dunbar, 2005), the influential Dutch geographer Sebald Steinmetz (Van der Wusten, 2005) and the raffish explorer-colonialist Thomas Stamford Raffles, who enjoyed differing interpretations of his work in life and in death, from Dutch (critical) and British (laudatory) commentators (Shaw, 2005). The contribution of

Johannes Gabriel Granö and of his student Edgar Kant to the development of Estonian geography from the 1920s onwards through work in urban geography and studies of the native Baltic landscape has been marked (Buttimer, 2005; Granö, 2005; Jauhiainen, 2005; Raagmaa, 2005). Elsewhere, the intellectual origins of John Kirtland Wright's use of the term 'geosophy', 'the study of the world as people conceive of and imagine it', is considered in relation to Wright's childhood geographies, imagined and locally real (Keighren, 2005a).

In being given insight into the lives and works of a dozen or so 'geographers of influence', understanding that term always to have varying contingent and local significance also reveals the discipline of geography to be always diverse, the question of what, locally and globally, people did to 'make' geography always captured through different remembrances: as an admired colleague, by stimulated pupils, as an irascible fieldworker, a brilliant teacher but hopeless administrator, as a writer of books which established an agenda despite rather than because of what the author was striving to say (as Hägerstrand felt). There will always be different biographies for the different parts and places of geographers' lives, perhaps never – or not easily so – *The Biography*. This assertion is lent considerable weight by two recent biographical assessments, both of which reveal there to have been multiple versions of the individuals concerned.

In a set of 17 papers, friends, colleagues, fellow activists and admirers (the categories are not discrete) offer critical assessment of the life and work, the 'geographical and political vision', of James Blaut (Mathewson and Wisner, 2005). If for geographers alone 'there are at least five different Jim Blauts' – geopolitical theoretician, macrohistorical geographer of Eurocolonialism, cognitive developmental geographer, ethnocultural ecologist and 'avid amateur zoogeographer' (keen birdwatcher) – the Blautian sobriquet 'radical cultural geographer' connects them

all (Mathewson, 2005: 911). Yet none is sufficient, individually or in combination, to describe a man of trenchant geographical oppositionalism and political commitment (Harvey, 2005; Peet, 2005), cultural ecologist and peasant theorist (Johnson *et al.*, 2005; Sheppard, 2005; Sluyter, 2005; Rodrigue, 2005), cognitive mapper (Stea, 2005; Varanka, 2005), and professional activist, in different places and ways, towards a more just world (Koch *et al.*, 2005; Santana, 2005; Soni and Maharaj, 2005; Falah, 2005; Wissoker, 2005; Wisner *et al.*, 2005). A short 'Blaut on Blaut' entry affords an autobiographical endnote: 'perhaps most, of my writings have been scholarly ... arguments analyzing and critiquing oppression in its various forms: Eurocentrism, colonialism, racism' (Mathewson and Wisner, 2005: 908).

Those now or in later years seeking guidelines on how to chart the legacy of the several Jim Blaunts and the several Torsten Hägerstrands could do much worse than follow the example of Nicolaas Rupke in his recent writings on that figure once so often taken as a 'founding father' or 'maker' of modern geography, Alexander von Humboldt (Rupke, 2005a; 2005b). In the first and shorter essay (Rupke, 2005a), we are shown how, after his death, Humboldt was made to have had political, even revolutionary, sentiments never publicized (and not always true) in life. In the second and fuller account of Humboldt's biographical treatment we are offered a detailed guide to how, in various ways, this major intellectual figure was biographically-geographically represented: 'My primary concern is with the representational approaches employed by Humboldt's biographers and with the embeddedness of these in the remembrance culture of any one period of political history' (Rupke, 2005b: 18). But Rupke does more than that. With reference to German scholarly literature, he locates Humboldt's biographical treatment geographically: an East German Humboldt (lauded as a proto-communist), a West German Humboldt (the cosmopolitan natural

scientist) – even, later, mapping Humboldt's appearance in German intellectual culture as an environmentalist and supporter of gay rights. This is a significant work of metabiography. For here revealed is the dual importance of geography to biography and of the geography of biography in assessing the place of biography in geography. It is a study borne of considerable scholarship and one with important methodological implications for historians of geography.

III Reading, speaking/writing, picturing: issues in interpretive authority

Not the least of these implications, of course, and it is one not constrained to biographical assessment, is how works of geography are differently read by their audiences. Questions to do with the geographies of reading, with 'the fundamental importance of the spaces where reading literally *takes place*, for knowledge is produced in textual encounter', are the central concern of Livingstone (2005a: 392). He focuses upon the mobility of textual knowledge and upon its variegated reception with reference to the notions of spaces of textual circulation, sites of textual hybridity, cartographies of textual reception and the cultural geography of reading.

Not necessarily with reference to these terms, others have likewise turned to the hermeneutic issues of text-meaning-reader-meaning, each, with Livingstone, stressing not the passive 'consumption' of geographical ideas, but rather their interpretive making and remaking in different social and intellectual spaces (see also Livingstone, 2005b). The reception and readership of volume V of Joan Blaeu's 1654 *Atlas Novus* – part of a major early modern geographical publishing project – has been traced in the marginalia of experts whose words then helped shape the 1662 edition, and in the reading practices of students in the 1690s who damaged the University Library's copy (Withers, 2005b; on reading, note taking and textual encounter, see also Daston, 2004). With reference to Peter

Heyleyn's 1621 *Microcosmus* and to John Pinkerton's *Modern geography* (1802), Mayhew (2005a) assesses the citational geography of the authors in order to map their different intellectual worlds. There were differences, notes Mayhew, in the geography of that Republic of Letters with which these men worked, in the geographical origin of the past sources being cited in support of new geographies and tensions between nationalism and cosmopolitanism in who was drawn upon and why. National perspectives, but more evidently particular local representations, were also to the fore in the reporting of the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition of 1902–1904. Here, the rhetoric of high-latitude sensationalism commonly associated with the British media's coverage of Polar exploration was mediated by a Scottish press concerned to see the Expedition not as 'heroic' but as scientific, divorced from the RGS and the Admiralty and, above all, Scottish (Keighren, 2005b). The subject of Antarctic exploration more generally, its political making, disciplinary specialization and overall reception is the subject of recent commemorative work a century or so after the *Discovery* voyage (Fogg, 2005).

More recently, Donald Meinig's magnificent four-volume *The shaping of America* is interpreted in the context of its time and shaping influences, Wynn discerning laudatory but also somewhat 'picky' interpretations of 'one of the great accomplishments of twentieth century American geography' (Wynn, 2005: 625), Baker seeing in the work's 'superb and sustained scholarship' the flowering of a particular form of regional historical geography while also asking 'for whom are Meinig's volumes intended and who can be expected to read them?' (Baker, 2005: 644). Elsewhere, others make public their readings and interpretations of another significant work of American geography, Neil Smith's *American empire* (Jones, 2005).

If reading as an interpretive process is shaped by its different geographies, as geography by its different readings, so too speaking

and writing. Questions of Anglophone authority and hegemony continue to be to the fore, Belina in particular permitting of little interpretive misunderstanding (Belina, 2005). As three German native speakers undertaking their geographical craft in various ways in Glasgow, Helms *et al.* (2005) look less at the theoretical context of language in Anglo-American human geography (although that is part of their concern) and more at the everyday context of language in research practice, at the problems of living in and writing through a language that is not one's own, at the awkwardness of linguistic condescension and even whether or not silence everywhere means the same (Helms *et al.*, 2005). In such work we can see a continuing interest in the power of language itself, the act of speaking/writing that tries to communicate knowledge and/or discern hidden meanings in an otherwise taken-for-granted world – in terms of Derrida's deconstructionism for example (Barnett, 2005; Dixon and Jones, 2005; Doel, 2005) – and in terms of the hegemony of Anglo-American geography which, argues Kitchin, is being unthinkingly reproduced in large part through particular publishing practices and conferences (Kitchin, 2005).

Such questions – in truth, more to do with geography's capacity to speak with and be listened to by other disciplines – elsewhere animated a conference-based concern for 'conversations' in geography that, now published, posit contemporary geography's place 'at the leading edge of a transdisciplinary turn', as a 'cluster of specialisms', and as something 'too important to leave to geographers' (S.J. Smith, 2005: 389). To the extent that these conversations toward 'joined-up geographies' concern themselves with human geography, we are given short and stimulating pieces: on scale (Marston *et al.*, 2005), on geography and psychotherapy (Bondi, 2005), on 'geographies of relatedness' (Nash, 2005), and on the links between geography, biology and technology (Thrift, 2005b) (Livingstone, 2005a, is also part of these conversations). Noting that 'These papers signal a shift of

emphasis at the cutting edge of the discipline', and that they 'largely, buy into the idea of geography as a cluster of specialisms, glued in place by a common respect for (some idea of) space' (S.J. Smith, 2005: 389), it is interesting that it is only geographers in conversation one with another. To the uninitiated, these *bon mots* could be interpreted as geography ta(l)king itself apart as much as signalling to new possibilities.

As part of a larger shared concern to consider geography's place in revolutions of various type (technical, political and scientific) (Livingstone and Withers, 2005), Ryan examines the role of photography in African exploration, notably in the 1858–64 Zambesi Expedition (Ryan, 2005). Both this paper and that of Dritsas (2005) consider the ways in which different practices of expeditionary visualization – Ryan through photography, Dritsas through sketching and engraving – allowed pictures of distant commodities (native humans, exotic shells) to become knowledge: only when dislocated from their context of discovery could their interpretation properly begin.

Where in the world you were and with whom you spoke mattered to what sort of geography was visualized. What was considered 'on the spot' visualization gave an immediacy to the scientific gaze, an 'I've-been-there' credibility to the picture-taker and tale-teller. But such iconographic veracity was not easily achieved nor always believed by others (Greppi, 2005). Brotton (2005) charts the epistemological significance of early Dutch maps of the Cape of Good Hope, noting parallels between the cartographic 'opening out' of the Indian Ocean to the western geographical imagination and the rhetorical construction of geographical 'otherness' as native peoples in southern Africa were marginalized by and literally on maps, disciplined through the print capitalism of cartography. For earlier periods, maps have heuristic potential in depicting the boundedness and, more so, the connectedness of human culture (M. Smith, 2005). Curry

revisits – with approval – the scale-based Classical tradition of *topos/choros/geos* in his discussion of maps and the often unthinking equation of notions of space and place in contemporary geographical usage (Curry, 2005). Cosgrove's examination of the connections between art and cartography in the twentieth century stresses the importance of mapping practices in the emergence of modern visual culture (Cosgrove, 2005a).

A variety of work examines the representation of different geographies in and of the nineteenth century. Bell (2005) discusses the photographic 'making' of Samoa in ways which often belied the brute realities of its colonial exploitation, Arnold (2005) the written and pictured views of the Himalayas in the nineteenth-century biogeographical work of Joseph Hooker. As was only too apparent in the writings of Charles Darwin and of Alfred Russel Wallace, understanding the 'geography of life' depended greatly upon how such a thing was visualized (Moore, 2005). On land so at sea, for, as Burnett notes in a fascinating essay on Maury's work in nineteenth-century hydrography and oceanography, charting trade winds on graph and map lent epistemic significance to others' tacit knowledge and to Maury's own project of naval reform (Burnett, 2005).

Outlining their survey of the complex politics of relevance in geography, Staeheli and Mitchell rightly observe of the present – and of geography's future relevance no doubt – 'that the issue of what makes research relevant cannot be separated from the questions of why research should be relevant, how research becomes relevant, the goals of research, and for whom it is intended to be relevant' (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2005: 357). What the above work reminds us in relation to the continuing significance of historical perspectives on geography's utility is that relevance and meaning depend greatly too upon how the knowledge is made and represented, written and otherwise, and upon knowing how different parts of the world have been read and spoken about in different ways.

IV Sites and spaces of significance

Writing on different geographical knowledge in a collection devoted to the multidisciplinary contributions of Annegret Simms – German-born, Glasgow-trained and for 37 years a member of staff in University College Dublin – Buttimer (2004) offers a chronological view of practices and interests within geography's history, principally since the 1960s, that is curiously neglectful of geographical differences in the making and taking-up of different types of geography. Yet much recent work has pointed to such issues in a variety of ways and, *pace* Marston *et al.* (2005), at a variety of scales.

Tropicality, the tropical world, the making of the tropics as a space for geographical inquiry, has figured prominently. Driver and Martins (2005) bring together an engaging and important set of essays on this topic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some of which have been noted above. Also notable in connecting with the above biographical and interpretive themes is Dettelbach's discussion of Humboldt's 'construction' of the tropics as a space of luxuriance which demanded particular practices of travel, observation and sensibility and which thus provided a formative setting for certain kinds of geographical enquiry (Dettelbach, 2005). With respect to geography's more modern history, this question of the place of the tropics and of discourses of tropicality has been taken up by others. As Bowd and Clayton note, 'tropicality' has had a certain representative potency in western geographical discourse, equivalent to if not the equal of Said's 'Orientalism' (Bowd and Clayton, 2005: 271–72). This was perhaps particularly so in French geography. After 1945, the establishment of a distinct field of 'tropical geography' in French geography, which was strongly rooted in the practices of French colonial science, transcended easy divisions between human and physical geography: important subthemes appeared in medical geography and in tropical soils and ecology even as shifts away from environmental determinism were not always sensitive to the wider geopolitical

context of separation from French colonial rule (Bruneau, 2005; Claval, 2005; Cleary, 2005; Kleinen, 2005; Raison, 2005). Under the influence of figures such as Pierre Gourou, who in particular raised its profile in French geographical work at home and in Asia, 'tropicality' perhaps had, as one commentator has it, 'an epistemologically stronger and more institutionalised relationship with francophone geography than was the case in Anglophone geography' (Bruneau, 2005: 304). Again, such a claim must always be considered in relation to different people and places. As Power and Sidaway show, tropical geography was a powerful precursor, if not always an 'intentional' one, in the emergence in the 1960s of development geography in British human geography (Power and Sidaway, 2004). As Cosgrove cautions, there are always different 'ontological tropics', 'made up' tropics serving different geographical purposes (Cosgrove, 2005b: 215–16).

For others, geography's place in and, through its different books, as a means to revolutionary discourse has been the subject of study: in relation to the geographies of the 'Scientific Revolution' (Withers, 2005c), in the political revolutions of seventeenth-century England (Mayhew, 2005b), and to those of late eighteenth-century France and America (Heffernan, 2005a; Livingstone, 2005c). In each case, particular books of geography were important – Heffernan seeing in Edme Mentelle's writings a strategic shift from Royalist to republican geography that mirrored the audiences of the time, Livingstone tracing in Morse's American geographies a rejection of European readings of America and a blueprint for a new moral order along geographical lines.

Summary national accounts review the 'absent' place of cultural geography in contemporary Italy (Minca, 2005), Dame Evelyn Stokes' contribution to postcolonial work in New Zealand geography (D'Hautesserre, 2005), and, in longer essays, geography's place in Australia where Anderson in particular offers a broad consideration of contemporary

geographical issues around the fraught notions of 'nature' and 'native' with reference to a partial reading of Enlightenment conceptions and the lingering legacy of Griffith Taylor's strident environmentalism (Anderson, 2005; Dowling, 2005). In a survey of the 'critical heritage' of Japanese human geography since the 1920s, Mizuoka *et al.* (2005) note that while 'critical geography' has been practised in Japan since the 1920s and 1930s when Japanese social scientists engaged with Marxist thought and, for some anyway, criticized right-wing elements of European geopolitics, the history of Japanese human geography since 1945 has been marked by an avowedly utilitarian economic focus, by the turn of some to Stalinist perspectives and, latterly, by explicitly theoretical work in a period when the future of the subject is by no means certain: 'In terms of disciplinary politics, geography in Japan is now exposed on the one hand to neo-liberalism and on the other to the crisis of liquidation through university reform' (Mizuoka *et al.*, 2005: 468).

The 'doing' of geography has always been – is always – politicized. As Heffernan shows in discussing the complicity of elements of France's geographical community with the Vichy Government in the 1940s, elements within the *Société de Géographie Commerciale de Paris* used 'commercial geography', then a form of internationalist political-cum-economic geography, to support a right-wing agenda at home and abroad (Heffernan, 2005b). His review of the institutional expression of this type of French geography in this period might usefully be paired with Clout's (2005b) account of the discipline in that country in the 1930s. For, as Clout shows, different sorts of geography were at work then, academic and popular (each with a significant imperial tone, tropical geography included). In 1931 in Paris, the high international profile enjoyed by France's academic geographers was reflected in the meeting there of the XIIIth International Geographical Congress – a site for and sort of geography in

stark contrast to the exoticism of the 'popular geography' then on display at the Exposition Coloniale.

Tracing the 'tortured trajectory' of geography at that time in France – or anywhere else – (to borrow a phrase from the account above of Japanese geography: Mizuoka *et al.*, 2005), will always require sensitivity to the institutional sites of its making and reception (see also Naylor, 2005). This is as true of the private practices of geographical fieldwork revealed in Lorimer's account of familial geography in upland Scotland (Lorimer and Spedding, 2005), as it is of the public civic spaces given over to the institutionalized display of natural knowledge (Finnegan, 2005). And, as Farish and Barnes remind us in stimulating papers, geography has also been made, recorded and stored in the spaces in between the 'public' and the 'private', in times of war most certainly but also during the cold war, in institutions which recognized, perhaps more than now, geography's strategic significance as a political weapon (Barnes, 2006; Farish, 2005).

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