

Cultural Turns/ Geographical Turns:

Perspectives on Cultural Geography

Edited by
Ian Cook, David Crouch,
Simon Naylor
and James R. Ryan



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Foreword

*Ian Cook, David Crouch, Simon Naylor
and James R. Ryan*

Over the last twenty or so years geography has followed and absorbed work from across the social sciences and the humanities, to become a discipline thoroughly inculcated in debates over and around ‘culture’. From landscape paintings to consumption, from Foucault to Empire, from maps to sexuality, geography has engaged with a wide variety of issues, concerns, theories and methods of relevance to the study of ‘culture’ in all its forms. In some ways marking the developments in the nascent field that came to be known as ‘new’ cultural geography’ came a series of conferences: at University College London in 1987, at Edinburgh in 1991 (from which the volume *New Words, New Worlds* emerged), and at Oxford in September 1997. Whilst the arguments contained within the realms of this particular volume track across numerous fora they became focused through the 1997 conference organized under the auspices of the Social and Cultural Geography Research Group of the RGS/IBG.

This volume brings together 31 authors from many different intellectual backgrounds and disciplines. Within it there are a number of approaches and standpoints, varying in length and style. The balance of empirical and theoretical work also ranges widely amongst chapters and parts. Moreover, the chapters do not ‘toe’ a single ‘line’, yet common threads run through each contribution and the part in which they are placed – the investigation of the relationship between culture and space.

This book stretches the idea of ‘the cultural’ in geography to embrace large areas across the discipline. Moreover, it breaks the boundaries of geography itself and overlaps with work in anthropology, cultural studies, sociology and the humanities. Yet it holds all of these aspects in a relationship with geography and what geography does and what geographers contribute. The book is divided into five parts and the part titles demonstrate something of this range: ‘Popular culture and cultural texts’, ‘Culture and political economy’, ‘Nature and society’, ‘Spaces and subjectivities’. Within these parts lie further categories concerning, for instance, nations and nationalism, cities and urban spaces,

regions, ethnicity, sexuality and gender, but it has been the editors' intention to avoid categorizations as much as possible and provide parts that are inclusive. However, a groundwork of issues is contained in the first part, 'Cultural turns/geographical turns', whilst the introductions to each part outline engagements of four arenas of geographical debate and present key fulcra around which these debates are likely to evolve in the immediate future.

Just from this short foreword it is already obvious that there has been less a *cultural turn* than a series of cultural insights, turns, multiple circuits. Geography has become, perhaps, embodied by cultural discourse. However, in this book there is a critical awareness of the dilemmas of cultural discourse in geography that will hopefully set the scene for numerous further discussions and investigative work.

Reference

Philo, C. (ed.) (1991) *New Words, New Worlds. Reconceptualising Social and Cultural Geography*, Lampeter, Social and Cultural Geography Study Group.

Introduction

Dead or alive?

Nigel Thrift

Surely there are few commentators who would want to deny that the cultural turn in the social sciences and humanities – including in human geography – has paid enormous intellectual dividends. More than this, it has simply made things a lot more *interesting*.

Yet, this is a particularly propitious time to be examining the state of this cultural turn. Why? Because there are signs of a thaw in the standard accounts of its emergence and maintenance: a number of critics have started to criticize both the foundational stories and the propositions upon which the turn was founded, and not always in bad-tempered ways.¹ The charge sheet can be distilled down into six related propositions which run as follows.

First, the cultural turn is charged with having become theoreticist. Not only does cultural work too often, in Sivanandan's (1993) phrase, turn the world into the word, but this is a specific case of a more general problem – that of letting theory outrun the data presented (when a more modest approach might be to cleave to a 'certain brand of empiricism, making the data so presented apparently outrun the theoretical effort to comprehend it' (Strathern, 1999, p. 199)). In apparent contradiction, a second often-voiced criticism is that the cultural turn has become a hard-hearted empiricism with a soft veneer; journalism without immediacy but with added sentiment. The world becomes a lucky dip, a source of innumerable case studies waiting to be plucked, suitably agonized over – in ever so reflexive ways, of course – and published. This is the cultural studies academic as world traveller.

Then, third, the cultural turn is charged with having become culturalist. This charge is often given voice by suggesting that cultural work neglects 'political economy', is insufficiently 'sociological', and the like. Usually this is a coded way of implying that cultural work too often ignores the gritty aspects of life like poverty that are still the lot of far too many. Fourth, the cultural turn is charged with abrogating all responsibility for asking questions concerning value, quality and truth. At best, cultural work has become an 'anything goes'

eclecticism with no sense of political project; at worst, an illustration of Oscar Wilde's aphorism that 'modern morality consists in accepting the standards of one's age'².

Fifth, the cultural turn is then charged with a lack of political bite. Whilst ostensibly pursuing political goals, there is an increasing gap between political mission and cultural practice – there is plenty of hype but no action (McChesney, 1995). Perhaps, so critics argue, this is because the cultural turn has been captured by the expanding disciplinary apparatus of cultural studies and, in this moment of institutionalization (Cultural Studies, 1998), what it has gained in legitimacy, it has lost in relevance.

Sixth, the cultural turn is caught up in its own pretensions. Written into its very fabric is a sense that it is both *avant-garde* – ahead of the game – and, by extension, on the margins of society. This is even though much of the cultural turn still consists of intellectual habits that might not have appeared out of place at the end of the last century, or before: scholastic residue has become radical gloss.²

Insofar as these charges deflate the pretensions of the cultural turn, they can only do good. They can help us to see that the cultural turn will probably prove to be primarily concerned with 'allowing everyday life and cultural experience to be fashioned into instruments of government via their inscription in new forms of teaching and training' (Bennett, 1998, p. 51; see also Barnett, 1998a, 1998b). They can help us to see that the cultural turn is still dominated by tired constructionist themes. They can help us to see that the prevailing academic mode of operation still depends on the figure of irony and so distance. They can help us to see how easy it is to slip into a too easy politics in which inquiry is 'cast as critique understood as the uncovering of relations of domination and, consequently, [is] rarely far from denunciation. Denunciation [is] commonly elided to politics and, in the end, victory is more often than not spiritual and discursive' (Rabinow, 1999, p. 9).

But, all this said, I think that we have to be careful not to lose that sense of *engagement with the emergent* which is so clearly a reason why the cultural turn has been so successful³. I think that this will be a much more modest sense of engagement borne out of joint curiosities as much as revolutionary programmes. I think this will also be a more performative sense of engagement, intended to identify

those forces or potencies where origins and outcomes cannot be specified independently of the open and necessarily incomplete series of their actualization. Such is their multiplicity that it can never be reduced to a set of discrete elements or to the different parts of a closed or organic whole. (Rajchman, 1998, p. 116)

And I think this will be a mode of operation which moves to new performative figures which do not view knowledge as just dominative power and/or protean desire. Knowledge as sight but also cite and site (Spinoza, Flores and Dreyfus, 1997).

This, in turn, requires valuing some related disclosive skills more than we do now. I think that these skills are of three kinds.⁴ The first of these skills is *methodological*. Cultural geographers have, over time, allied themselves with a number of qualitative methods, and most notably in-depth interviews and ethnographic 'procedures'. But what is surprising is how narrow this range of skills still is, how wedded they still are to the notion of bringing back the 'data', and then re-presenting it (nicely packaged up as a few supposedly illustrative quotations), and the narrow realms of sensate life they register.

This is all very odd for, since the 1960s, a whole plethora of methods has become available which have within them the potential to take us beyond this (repressed) place (Thrift, 1999). I am thinking here of all the methods fostered in the performing arts which attempt to co-produce the world – street theatre, community theatre, legislative theatre, and so on. I am thinking also of all those techniques which work with bodies – various forms of dance and music therapy, contact improvisation, and so on. I am thinking of the large number of initiatives in social psychology, aimed at boosting relational responsibility by focusing on group interaction (e.g. McNamee and Gergen, 1998). I am thinking of various forms of performative writing which have sprung up from disciplines as diverse as anthropology, feminism and performance studies. I am thinking, too, of the increasing use of interactive web sites which reform and perform on the internet (e.g. Hill and Paris, 1998).

Further, each and every one of these developments involves, centrally and intimately, the production of spaces, for example, both through altering the conditions of possibility of extant spaces, and by producing new spaces. These are not just gestures to new ground.

The emphasis on world-making which informs this methodological break-out, also informs another set of skills that are important. These are the skills of 'fabulation', a term used by Bergson to refer to a visionary faculty and taken up by Deleuze (1995, p. 17) to refer to 'creative story telling that is, as it were, the obverse of the dominant myths and fictions, an act of resistance that creates line of flight on which a minority discourse and a people can be constituted'. Such fabulations can be used to generate new models of government which resonate more fully with experience than some of the totalizing designs of old. I admit to being utterly taken, for example, by Charles Fourier's often bizarre account of Harmony, an imaginary community founded on the circulation of all the senses. There is no space here to go into all the details of Fourier's synaesthetic union (but see Beecher and Bienvenu, 1971; Beecher, 1986; Barthes, 1976; Mattelart, 1996; Classen, 1998) in which the profound and the burlesque cohabit.⁵ But what is startling is how few parallels there are to these kinds of imaginative political projects today. It is as if utopian thought is off the agenda, replaced by the work of technicians (as in Giddens' (1998) *The Third Way*). Yet it is not as if the longing for these stories is not there. I think of the renewed interest in Geddes, whose often bizarre inventions and diagrams are a part of the integral character of his work, of some feminist science fiction which clearly is, in part, a political project and, most recently, of Michael Taussig's extraordinary (1997) *The Magic of the State*, an attempt to conjure up a performance

of government which, at the same time, provides clues as to how it might be out-performed. In other words, what we can see here is a politics of desiring, taking shape as an immediation (Grossberg, 1998).⁶

These thoughts lead to one more set of skills which seem to me to be in short supply, what might be called ethical expertise. These skills have been given a very high profile of late but as a kind of technology of decision. The problem is how we can make ethics into something more general. I therefore go along with Tom Osborne (1998, p. 193) when he argues that:

My intention in using the vocabulary of ethics has not been so as to join the decisionist bandwagon by saying that ethics is all, in effect, that we have left. It is rather to isolate the ethical dimension that is the background to all our coherent human activities, including those associated with the pursuit of faith. That means a critique of enlightenment would be completely useless in formulating any kind of ethical theory. It is more deliberately critical than the grandiose projects of a MacIntyre or a Bauman in that it is concerned not with a general diagnosis of the possibility of ethics in the present, but with, so to speak, acting directly on an ethical propensity. This is not a discourse *about* ethics, but an ethical form of discourse in its own right, one which takes the task to be to stretch the limits of what it is possible to think, not in the interest of this or that project of enlightenment or reform, but in the interests of an exercise in judgement itself.

It is this exercise of judgement which seems to me to be such a crucial element of three different but utterly related literatures which I believe to be some of the most interesting currently in this regard. One is the derivation of a 'trans-human' constitution of the kind to be found in actor-network theory, and some of the work on animals, and on new technologies. This literature is attempting to produce an ethics which will be able to take in the expanding ecology of mind. The second is the work of feminist theorists like Nussbaum and others who are attempting to expand the horizon of care. And the third is the growth of work on the modern university as a place where the capacity for judgement is (or at least should be) fostered through an openness which prevents academics from clustering in small inward-looking groups which superannuate and narrow (Perl, 1998). In each case, what these literatures incorporate is a sense of an ethics of possibility which seems to me to be the only stance we can now take.

To conclude, it seems to me that we can shake off some of the illusions of the cultural turn and still generate a sense of intense engagement by recognizing that practice does not 'soil the pure expectation of theoretical possibility with its very groundedness' (Kirby, 1997, p. 155). Further, this sense of engagement insofar as the cultivation of cultural and practical *generosity* is one of the key principles, can also provide a renewed sense of personal engagement (just as long as we realize that the person is precisely one of the terms that is now most contested). So perhaps there is no need to pack up and go home quite yet, especially since, in so many parts of the world, people still find the energy to dance in chains. To the extent that the risk is there, there is no reason why the cultural turn has to turn bad.

Notes

1. See, for example, the collections edited by Ferguson and Golding (1997) and McRobbie (1997), books such as Bennett (1998) and responses such as Morley (1998), or Kline (1998). Bennett (1998) is particularly good on how being 'in the true' in cultural studies entails employing narratives based on highly romantic stereotypes of both politics and persons.
2. For example, in cultural geography nearly all work in areas like landscapes and postcolonialism is still based on inadvertently Cartesian models of representation and interpretation which have been junked elsewhere in the social sciences and humanities. Similarly in research on consumption, ethnicity, and other areas much effort is still devoted to models of 'reading' (even if the reader is allowed to become more active, in itself, as Gell (1998) notes, an assumption with massive cultural presuppositions) which are increasingly seen as inappropriate elsewhere in the social sciences and humanities.

What does all this mean for cultural geography? The problem is that cultural geography needs to be both more theoretical *and* more empirical. More theoretical certainly. Most cultural geographers are not trained in theory, and use it as though it were a technique (hence the bizarre calls for applying particular theories to politics). On the whole, cultural geographers' use of theory therefore remains resolutely eucomistic and representational; and therefore in danger of simply retracing steps already made by others. But cultural geography is not empirical enough either. Its range of methods is remarkably small and, underneath all the rhetoric, really quite conservative. Why might this be? There are no doubt many reasons, but I think one of the most important is probably training. Most undergraduate and postgraduate degrees simply do not give sufficient depth or challenge to enable prospective geographers to see the possibilities.

3. For me, such a sense of engagement comes from three main sources. The first is that Nietzschean strain to be found in so many modern works from Foucault to Deleuze, a gay science which attempts to conserve and create the positive, 'a form of expansive knowledge that will heat up the universe and render it conducive for the mixing of all kinds of foreign elements and the explosion of new sparks' (Ansell-Pearson, 1998, p. 55). The second is some modern feminist theory which tries to engage the limits of the possible, especially the work of Cixous and Irigaray. The third is distributed theories of practice (see Thrift, 1996). Each and every one of these strands of work is distinguished by their commitment to non-representational issues.
4. I become a little frustrated with academics who believe that they can simply read off politics and, indeed, the urge to be political as though people simply took a decision to be political on the basis of rational deliberation. In contradiction, each of these three skills are, it should be noted, skills of *intense involvement* (Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus, 1997).
5. Fourier based his cosmos on the model of music:

on earth, humans constitute musical notes, with the particular note of each individual dominated by his or her dominant character traits. In Fourier's plan for the perfect society, human 'notes' are grouped together in work and social units to fashion 'major and minor scales', and 'choirs'. This plan for harmonizing personality types through social organization gave Fourier's utopia its name, Harmony. (Classen, 1998, p. 25)

6. And a desperate need to teach skills such as creative writing.

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PART I

Cultural turns, geographical turns



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Introduction

James R. Ryan

Few commentators would disagree with the claim that the cultural turn in contemporary geography has represented and produced new ways of thinking about culture and geography. There is, however, much less consensus on the processes underpinning this trend as well as its long-term consequences (Barnett, 1998b; Castree, 1999). Warnings of the theoreticist, journalistic, culturalist, irrelevant, pretentious tendencies of the currents which constitute the cultural turn might deflate its grander posturing. Yet at the same time its critical currency at the centre of such debate further establishes it as a fixture in a range of intersecting intellectual landscapes. As Nigel Thrift points out in his preceding Introduction in this volume, this is an opportune moment in geography, and in the social sciences and humanities more generally, for the refashioning of critical cartographies of the cultural turn. Having said this, we should not posit the situation as one of either-or choices; the cultural turn as a single track, downhill path which is either taken or rejected in favour of some alternative, more level-headed route. Indeed, it is profitable intellectually and politically to travel on a number of routes and roundabouts; to support and critique simultaneously this absorption with the cultural (Butler, 1998).

This opening part consists of three essays which engage in different ways with the general themes of this volume and set the scene for many of the debates which follow. Each essay makes an important contribution to the generation of more nuanced accounts of the distances covered and directions taken thus far on the cultural turn. They should not, however, either individually or collectively, be taken as attempts at comprehensive overviews of some uniform, singular and complete development. To map fully the interwoven twists and turns of 'culture' and 'geography' would be a mammoth and a complex task, involving negotiation of the complex genealogies of both these terms, as well as their inflection within dynamic disciplinary and geographical settings. In any case, useful introductions to many of these fields, from cultural geography (Crang, 1998) to cultural theory and popular culture (Storey, 1993), as well as more

comprehensive assessments of the cultural turn in geography are readily available elsewhere (Barnett, 1998a; Matless, 1995, 1996; McDowell, 1994). There is neither the space nor the intention to produce full surveys here. Rather, the essays in Part I – like others throughout this book – are offered as deliberately selective and careful accounts of aspects and effects of the cultural turn from particular perspectives.

Whilst the essays in Part I refer inevitably to disciplinary boundaries and foci, notably of anthropology, geography and sociology, they also emphasize their porosity and the fruitful outcomes which stem from their blurring. For whilst ideas of culture in geography have drawn on work in cultural studies, anthropology, sociology and related fields, geographical metaphors and techniques for ‘mapping’ the ‘topographies’ of culture have become incorporated into the language and practice of disciplines such as cultural studies (see, for example, Baldwin *et al.*, 1998).

Part I begins with an essay by anthropologist George E. Marcus in which he considers the more recent cultural interweavings of geography and anthropology. Conceptualizations of culture within geography have long been influenced by parallel developments in anthropology. Early cultural geography drew on ideas developed in cultural anthropology for its definitions of culture which focused on the material productions of particular social groups. More recently, the lively interest across human geography in retheorizing culture – central to the whole ‘cultural turn’ – owes much to the important work by anthropologists such as Marcus on the interpretation of cultures and politics of cultural representation (see, for example, Geertz, 1973; Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

In his essay Marcus considers the potentials of geographical and anthropological dialogue within the setting of what he terms ‘the sobering wake of the great awakening’, where the ‘theoretical imaginaries’ which characterized the beginnings of the cultural turn have given way to more grounded and applied work in a second wave of interdisciplinary research strategies. Taking ‘multi-sited ethnography’ as his focus, Marcus argues that both ‘obvious’ strategies (tracking movements and exchanges of transnational communities, or the circulation of objects) and ‘non-obvious’ strategies (exploring the unknown networks and disjunctions between particular places and emergent social relations) pose important reformulations of the idea and practice of ‘fieldwork’ and suggest new dialogues between and within geographical and anthropological enquiry. Whilst Marcus is keen to endorse such interdisciplinary connections and developments he ends his essay in cautious mode with an interview with Wlad Godzich in which the latter argues for the significance of the temporal, as opposed to the spatial, in ethnographic enquiry.

The effects of the cultural turn upon embedded research practice is also the concern of Chris Philo who, in the second essay, reflects critically upon the cultural turn within social and cultural geography. As an enthusiastic pioneer of the cultural turn within British geography Philo is well placed to offer an avowedly personal account of aspects of this trend and the problems which its hegemony poses for the theory and practice of human geography. In particular, Philo shows how a narrow preoccupation with the ‘cultural’ can result in

'dematerialized' and 'desocialized' geographies. In his concern with the neglect of the 'social' and his critique of abstract, un-'earthed' enquiry Philo has much in common with Marcus. Whilst Marcus puts forward multi-site fieldwork as one means of renewing 'social' questions whilst keeping the interpretative gains of the cultural turn, Philo points to recent studies in geography which, blending theoretical sophistication with empirical grounding, do not simply redress the balance away from flighty 'cultural' concerns to proper 'social' questions, but actively recast categories of 'social' and 'cultural', 'material' and 'immaterial', revising the relations between them.

Questions of the fate of 'the social' under the shadow of the cultural turn also provide the focus for the third and final essay in Part I, by the sociologist John Clarke who takes a more 'applied' domain than either geography or anthropology, namely social policy. Clarke explores the place of the cultural turn within dynamic currents in social policy and a transforming welfare state. As Clarke reminds us, welfare policies are shaped decisively by conceptions of social groupings and cultural identity, from 'the family' to 'the nation'. Yet what is actually meant and understood by concepts of 'social' and 'cultural' within fields such as social policy has changed considerably in the last half century.

The insistence in recent years upon the 'socially constructed' nature of identities previously thought of as fixed or natural – of 'race', disability, sexuality – within professional welfare practice has been closely connected to conceptual and methodological debates within social policy. Here a localized manifestation of the cultural turn, incorporating a range of theoretical perspectives and methodological influences as well as individuals and social movements, has nourished new conceptions of social policy study and practice. Clarke shows that whilst the rise of interest in the cultural and social construction of identity can offer important new ways of thinking about social policy, it can render welfare issues vulnerable to attempts to 'de-socialize' them. Such attempts stem from a range of factors, including political tendencies towards individualism; redefinitions of social problems as 'moral' ones; the rediscovery of biology (notably in genetics); and the definition of social issues (such as 'race') as matters of geography. The results, as Clarke shows, are both complex and contradictory, and yet it is within such a landscape of the cultural turn that the most provocative and difficult questions arise.

These three essays provide an important opening on to the issues developed throughout this book by posing a range of difficult questions of the cultural turn from different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. In their accounts of particular moments and settings within anthropology, geography and social policy, these essays show some of the complexity obscured within that catch-all term 'the cultural turn' and show how it has particular and localized versions and effects. Nevertheless, the essays also show the virtue of tracking some of the shared, intersecting and interdisciplinary domains in the social sciences which have been informed by the cultural turn and which continue to shape its myriad effects.

All three essays in Part I are concerned with making sober assessments of the cultural turn in the light of renewed interest in theoretically and empirically

grounded enquiry. In doing so they connect directly to wider calls within both geography (Barnett, 1998a) and cultural studies (Grossberg, 1993, 1998) for a renewed need to subject culture and cultural analysis to further theoretical scrutiny, and associated moves in human geography towards a more informed engagement with philosophical debate on issues such as ethics (Smith, 1997; Thrift, this volume). Taken together these contributions warn of any easy acceptance of theoretical and methodological assumptions characteristic of much of the cultural turn. Declarations that all manner of things are 'socially and culturally constructed' roll off many tongues and printers, yet the theoretical and analytical complexity behind such assertions are more rarely discussed (see Hacking, 1999). Furthermore, all of these essays stress the serious difficulty of combining critical, analytical awareness of the constructions of culture with attention to the 'solidification' of such constructions across a range of geographies. It is the potentials and problems of the kinds of engagement with the cultural turn discussed in these introductory essays which inform many of the essays in the remainder of this book.

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The twistings and turnings of geography and anthropology in winds of millennial transition

George E. Marcus

Several of the papers in this volume seem to operate from the assumption that the so-called cultural turn is mature, or even spent, as a purely theoretical enterprise. As an enterprise primarily of the 1970s and 1980s (also associated with overlapping labels like 'the postmodern turn' or 'the poststructuralist turn'), there was great ferment and stimulation in English-speaking academia over the study of culture, and the theory and practice of interpretation associated with it. I believe that the sense of the waning of the interdisciplinary fervour over the working out of new ideas at a sometimes indulgently theoretical level is very widespread at present. There now seems to be as widespread a preoccupation with developing the stock of ideas and styles of analysis as distinctive or experimental research programmes within those disciplinary traditions that were most affected by the cultural turn. While certain disciplines like geography (and less so anthropology) might have kept the balance between theoretical exegesis and empirical research traditions all along, there is a sense in which innovation for the moment has been recentred within the bounds of disciplinary authority rather than in their interstices – the sites of earlier interdisciplinary spaces built upon the critique and even scorn of disciplinarity. Yet, in the sobering wake of the great awakening, so to speak, that the cultural turn was for many scholars in the social sciences and humanities, I think there is immense

potential for a second wave of interdisciplinary fusions (partnerships, even) more fine-tuned and defined, along certain borders that crystallize as a result of affinities in how certain disciplines or disciplinary fractions responded to and assimilated the cultural turn. Reality, so to speak, signalled in the pervasive use of the yet poorly understood framing trope of globalization, is pressing upon the storehouse of theoretical imaginaries explored in the 1970s and 1980s. The task now is to experiment with research practices that both are rooted in distinctive disciplinary styles and arise from partnerships in how the cultural turn has defined affinities in modes of inquiry.¹

Here I want to explore the possibilities for this sort of partnership between anthropology and geography in the applied aftermath of the cultural turn as theoretical fervour, by offering to this volume a discussion of an emerging development in the practice of anthropology – what I have termed multi-sited ethnography – that brings it even closer to the kinds of research in geography most influenced by the cultural turn. Of course the working relations of the two disciplines have long been entwined while their professional fortunes have differed quite markedly, at least in the United States. Areal and regional geography has always been the base for the coherence of ethnographic research in anthropology. But as will be seen, the basis of this relationship in the present moment of so-called globalization, and after the heavily theoretical postmodern and cultural turns, is much less clear, but no less strong.

To sketch their current relationship briefly, while both are marginal disciplines in the United States, the disciplinary authority and presence of anthropology are better established than are geography's in the university (this of course has its advantages and disadvantages in terms of the freedom to innovate and synthesize). What the cultural turn has meant for anthropology is a strong reinforcement of its already strong valorization of hermeneutic depth in ethnography, and consequently its concerns with the interpretation of symbols, meanings and representations, at the cost of its treatment of social relations, social structures and systematic differences in political economy. As I will discuss, the necessity of multi-sited ethnography can be understood as a corrective to the inattention to the social while staying with the commitment to hermeneutic depth.

What the cultural turn has meant for geography is a strong intervention of interpretive theories, methods and ideas in a field heavily influenced by tasks of mapping, describing societies spatially, and by economic thinking. Perhaps more broadly open to considering and exploring the range of theories and ideas that the cultural turn offered than anthropology has been, geography also has not lost its own sense of the social to the same degree, nor has it pursued hermeneutic issues and problems with the culture concept as obsessively as anthropology has.

As will be seen below, the basis for a new sort of partnership between the current applied cultural turns in geography and anthropology arises from the tendencies and limits that the preceding period of rather freewheeling interdisciplinarity left each of these disciplines. Multi-sited ethnography, out of the cultural turn, certainly needs dialogue with the venturesome sort of culturally inflected consideration of contemporary processes of political economy that geography has evolved (and that the wing of anthropology concerned with

political economy failed to produce). More importantly, the consideration of multi-sized ethnography, or at least a multi-sized field of research, has already been anticipated and strongly pursued in geography (see, for example, Cook and Crang, 1996; Jackson and Thrift, 1995; Katz, 1992). And geography might benefit from the hermeneutic depth to cultural analysis that ethnography insists upon even as it becomes more geography-minded as it moves problematically from the intensely observed and engaged loci that have constituted the traditional *mise-en-scène* of fieldwork.

The emergence of multi-sited ethnography

Ethnography is in the midst of a second wave of reassessment, following upon the critique of traditional strategies of ethnographic representation, the so-called 'writing culture' critique of the 1980s (see Clifford and Marcus, 1986). This second wave focuses upon the sacred ground of fieldwork practice and is motivated by the ongoing changing pragmatics and conditions of fieldwork. Situating ethnography in relatively stable geographical space is giving way to the necessity of tracking and even defining cultural formations across a number of related sites of fieldwork. This is what the macro-processes keyed to the ubiquitous trope of globalization are forcing upon the traditional *modus operandi* of ethnographic fieldwork in anthropology. In a series of recent writings (Marcus, 1999a, 1999b), I have tried to articulate the considerable changes in the regulative assumptions and idealized norms that would be required in setting up a multi-sited ethnographic object of study for fieldwork. This is on the surface a plea for the consideration of methodology as the most important focus of theoretical attention now. But this is to some degree illusory. It is really a plea to look at the legacies of the so-called postmodern moment or the cultural turn not in theory, but as embedded in research practices as these finally try to come to terms with a self-consciously conceived world of great transformation and transition. At stake is how many of the traditional presuppositions of ethnography will be left standing and in what forms.

There are both obvious and non-obvious applications of multi-sited strategies. The obvious cases these days follow well marked pathways of process defined by macro-social theories or historical metanarratives, or they follow previously local subjects and objects of ethnography as they literally move in space and time under altered conditions of historical political economy. Tracking movements of migrants transnationally in diaspora and exile, or the history of the circulation of objects and techniques, or studying the relationships of dispersed communities and networks that define well designated macro-processes in the global flow of capital and expertise – these are the obvious contexts of contemporary ethnographic work that are challenging traditional norms of fieldwork in productive ways and are also opening new conduits of exchange with past interdisciplinary partners in other social sciences. Arjun Appadurai's influential 'scape' essays of the early 1990s (see Appadurai, 1997), for example, are a metaphorical map for this now strong wave of research. When anthropologists think of multi-sited work, most think of projects like

these whose contexts are defined by given lines of macro-social theory and historical narrative. Macro-processes may be changing, but there is nothing particularly problematic or unclear – untrackable – about the relationships or connections of peoples or objects ethnographically probed within the framework of these processes. This is where the border between anthropology and human geography is most clearly productive. The intensity of ethnography combined with the scoping political economy of geography with a heightened sensitivity to cultural interpretation shows much promise.

The other alternative is non-obvious applications of multi-sited strategies. It poses somewhat different challenges and suggests more radical alternatives than the above to the norms that have traditionally regulated fieldwork. These are the cases where processes are not given by contextualizing macro-theories and historical narratives, where the metaphors of tracking or following therefore do not work as well in constituting multi-sited objects of ethnographic study, where relationships or connections between sites are indeed not clear, the discovery and discussion of which are precisely in fact the main problem, contribution and argument of ethnographic analysis.

This frankly more mysterious kind of ethnography is often posed as that which operates in the realm of emergent social and cultural phenomena. Such multi-sited ethnography arises from putting questions to an emergent object of study whose contours, sites and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different, complexly connected real-world sites of investigation. These strategies raise the question of the nature of relationships between sites of activity and social locations that are disjunctive in space or time and perhaps in terms of social category as well (say, elites juxtaposed to subalterns, middle class to the poor, experts to non-experts, institutions to communities) whose relations are not obvious as given in any framing macro-social theoretical discourse or historical narrative, and may or may not be posed by ethnographic subjects themselves.² This problem for ethnography is signalled on the one hand by the increasing occurrence of virtuality in social relations and the problem of how to study it, and on the other hand, by the recent interest in circulation and flows in anthropology trying to come to terms with an idea of globalization at the level of ethnography, consistent with its past concerns with sites in which fieldwork with hermeneutic depth can be done.

Superficially, non-obvious strategies involving disjunctions and juxtapositions with speculations about relations retain the same use of geographical metaphors, and there is the strong potential of association with the work of human geography as is clearly the case with obvious strategies. Non-obvious strategies merely require more speculative geographies, insular to what they are trying to associate (and partly track). But there is also something challenging in this kind of multi-sited work to the geographical categories themselves on which it still depends. This is the kind of cautionary challenge that Wlad Godzich, a major figure responsible for bringing much of the European intellectual capital of the cultural turn during its theoretical heyday to English-speaking scholars, has articulated, and whose thinking is sampled in the final section of this paper.

The loss and reclamation of the social in recent ethnography

What is most importantly and most generally at stake for anthropology – and its connection to human geography – in the emergence of multi-sited ethnography is indeed a reorientation to the very idea of the social in situated cultural analysis inspired by the cultural turn of the past two decades. There is a general feeling among anthropologists today, more or less articulated in professional ‘corridor talk’, that the interest in all of those things that would be classed under the ‘social’ – social relations, processes, structures, systems, institutions, matters of political economy – have been relatively neglected in favour of attention to, for example, subject positions, identity construction, dialogic exchange and micro-examinations of embedded practices, restricted to the intimate traditional scene of fieldwork. Indeed, it might be argued that this finely wrought pre-occupation with the micro-cultural is about the social (*à la* Anthony Giddens’ location of structuration in situated agency, and Pierre Bourdieu’s location of what is systemic in the situation in the habitus) – just a different way of constructing it. But there is no doubt that within the production of ethnography the description of the terrain of the macro-social has suffered in its materialities, attention to scale, regimes of exchange, and resulting exposures of and concerns for inequalities. While it may be that what has happened has not been truly a loss of the social, at least there is a widespread sense among anthropologists of a relative inattention to it as a focusing concern in terms of classic questions of social theory. Instead there has been a tendency in ethnography to let the constructs, theories and work of other kinds of academics (including human geographers, political economists and postcolonial theorists, among others) to stand in, so to speak, for the macro, patterned sense of the social that contextualizes ethnographic work while itself probes voice, discourse, subjectivity and identity as its primary concerns.

At present, there seems to be a desire among anthropologists to find new ways to extend specifically ethnographic method and analysis into the contextualizing zone of the frames and constructs that now stand in for the macro-social, while also preserving the real advances in micro-cultural analysis that have been made over the past two decades. Certainly there is a concern to avoid the ‘swing of the pendulum’ situation – that the only way to refocus attention on the social would be to move back to older political economy perspectives, to allow the inevitable swing of fashion between the two poles of the symbolic and the material, the cultural and the political economic, to take its course. Indeed, since the 1980s there have been efforts by those trained in existing styles of political economy research in anthropology (e.g. the students of Eric Wolf), from their side, to take culture more seriously and especially, to incorporate cultural historical narratives into their accounts of global systems. But to those interested in the anthropology of the present, and who are primarily invested in the complex questions of cultural analysis raised by theories of representation, the micro-production of subjectivity, and the ever present reflexive effects of

particular regimes of constituting knowledge, these efforts have not been satisfying. Thus, it is for those who have been most vested in cultural analysis – those who have reinforced the study of culture in anthropology through the influences of the more general cultural turn – to produce their own reclamation of the social. The broad perspectives of writers such as Pierre Bourdieu, David Harvey, Fredric Jameson, and the many theorists of postcoloniality have provided provocative macro-views of late modern or postmodern social structural processes that for much contemporary ethnography has been allowed to stand for this dynamic contextualizing function of representing the social, but in some sense, this manner of contextualizing ethnography contradicts the basic impulse of the ethnographer to know the insides of whatever he or she studies – including its contexts – intimately and from subjects' perspectives. In a sense, letting constructs of the social define the ethnographic centre of contemporary anthropological research constrains the interpretation of ethnographic materials by essentially non-ethnographic perspectives. One major aim then of trying to theorize the already occurring multi-sited transformation of fieldwork is to encourage this move of a certain nomadic or rhizomic tendency in ethnography into a motivated change in the way that much contemporary ethnography constructs the space of the social as the contexts for its intimate eye and ear. The world of finance, markets, politics, and their institutions are ethnographic objects of study implicated in every fieldwork project these days and cannot be left to other constructions, if anthropology is to be responsible for its own contexts of meaning and the forging of its own arguments from inside the ethnographic process of research itself. This reclamation of the social context of ethnography is for me the most important stake for the current reconstruction of anthropology through multi-sited ethnographic projects.

The emerging norms of multi-sited fieldwork are the means of growing a renewed attention to the social out of the cultural turn's revolution in thinking about what goes on in the site of ethnography while still preserving the intensity and complexity of that revolution. Different paradigms of doing multi-sited work – and there are many detectable – would develop the social in different ways, but they all would move from the site of initial fieldwork into a contextualizing consideration of what Douglas Holmes in his study of the circulation of European right wing discourse (in press) has called 'the social within reach' as an integral dimension of the design of any multi-sited fieldwork project.

To the question 'Is this kind of always limited probing of the social in multi-sited ethnography enough?', I would answer 'Certainly not'. But this constitution of the social through the strategized movement of ethnography among different sites is always at least implicitly, and should end up explicitly, in dialogue or tension with non-ethnographically composed constructions, narratives and representations of the social in the work of historians, social theorists, and for my special interest here, of human geographers. The critical point, though, is that multi-sited research hesitates to work immediately with these constructions as the ground of ethnography.

The alternative, and a distinctly anthropological style, is to build the social out of local knowledge of it in the sites of fieldwork. There is a crucial and agile

methodological suspicion here that is deeply embedded in the tradition of cross-cultural translation at the core of anthropology. Thus, rather than the social being given or already defining of the terms of ethnography, there will always be a gap between other constructs and those generated by ethnography – and this is a very productive gap. Meditations on this gap are what generates the social in anthropological research deeply affected by the cultural turn. It is never more constructed or less problematic than this play in the gap between the interpreted situated knowledge of subjects and more distanced expert constructs, and there is no more valid way for it to return. Anthropologists themselves do not construct macro-social theory. In the past, they often have had reason to contest such theory. So why should they take such frames, narratives and macro-visions for granted in constructing their own projects of fieldwork? Not to do so, but to use the social within reach in any project is a way to re-engage representations of the social as processes which the ethnography documents in multi-sited space and then uses to challenge the existing theories, constructs, narratives and problematics that it would otherwise have precipitously embraced as the context (and limits of interpretation, as well) of its work.

Finally, there may be the fear that deriving the social from what the informant thinks (especially when the ethnographer starts with the situated imaginary within an empowered space of elite or expert practice) will just be native sociology, so to speak, albeit of natives who are in a sense counterparts of the anthropologist. And this, too, is not enough. Just as grasping the native point of view was never the sole point of ethnography, so ethnographic knowledge cannot be only native knowledge. The growing of a perspective on the social from intensive ethnography in multiple sites cannot be synonymous with elaborated native models of the social. As always, understanding native knowledge holds the key to how anthropologists achieve an independence of perspective. In multi-sited work, the anthropologist does take the native construction of the social seriously, as something to absorb, critique and extend, but in moving beyond an initial site where situated knowledge is very literally probed in relationship to its referent elsewhere (see note 2), the anthropologist produces his or her own construction of the social within reach. This construction based on fieldwork in other sites is played back eventually within an initial one, often as a critical challenge or intervention to so-called native sociology found there. A critical engagement with particular elite or expert representations of the social, understood itself through acts of ethnographic fieldwork, by the anthropologist who eventually returns to elite sites with the experience of grounded ethnography among referents that are only imagined or abstractly constructed in elite visions of the social, is the most fulfilling end of multi-sited ethnographic projects.

In a sense, this is what anthropologists have always done in their traditional terrain – undermining the west's view of primitives, exotic others through bringing back detailed, empirical knowledge of such referent peoples. Only now the terrain and geography of this traditional task have changed considerably, reconfiguring and fragmenting the communities among whom anthropologists move and define their work.

So, on the one hand multi-sited ethnography faces macro-theoretical and historical narrative efforts to represent what it develops in complicity with social actors – the social within reach of ethnographic projects – and on the other hand, builds its knowledge through strategies of work with these actors that has its moments of complex interdependence with as well as independence from them. All the social will ever be again for anthropologists most affected by the cultural turn is in these productive gaps, dialogues and engagements, on two fronts. This is by no means an unfavourable place for anthropologists to be after the cultural turn.

How, then, does this vision and implication of an even more deeply cultural anthropology after the cultural turn, but that is striving also to reconnect to issues of the society, intertwine with the ferment and possibilities in human geography as surveyed in the papers of this volume? Well, clearly the emergence of a multi-sited ethnography makes anthropological enquiry more geographic in nature, and not just in locating itself in relation to the conventional cartography of the globe, but in the very rhizomic constitution of its subjects of study amid sites, the relationships among which are the object of ethnographic interpretation and speculation.

Wlad Godzich's cautionary note

Much of the necessary and ongoing remaking of ethnographic method that I have described above along with its implication for the return of a kind of contingent but committed concern with the social depends on the use of spatial concepts, resting on metaphors like mapping, tracking, cartography, and imaginaries as keys to what sorts of perspectives and knowledge is now desired from subjects in fieldwork settings. This of course would appear to strengthen anthropology's connections to the sorts of developments in geography described in the diverse papers of this volume under the same influences of the 1980s and 1990s cultural turn. Undoubtedly, and happily so. But it is also useful to end on a cautionary note, since while spatial and geographic conceptual metaphors are irresistible, and in terms of the nineteenth century storehouse of social and cultural theories on which we still depend, they seem natural to what we confront empirically in our work, the very emphasis on the spatial may no longer work. Temporalities, for example, may now be more important in orienting social action at particular locations. A stimulating expression of this caution, for me, emerged in an interview that my colleagues and I conducted with Wlad Godzich³ on his visit to Rice in the autumn of 1998. His is a strong statement for the emphasis on the temporal rather than the geographic as required by emerging shifts in technologies of form-giving. There is much imprecision and informality in the way our interview unfolded and much to argue with, but I leave the following cuttings of Godzich's responses as a constructive provocation. They do not banish the related analytic styles of the ethnographic and the geographic of the cultural turn that I have evoked in this paper, but offer them challenges and probings that are well worth considering.

Wlad: I think the kinds of questions that you are raising are to be found in many disciplines at present, and this is in large measure a testament to the fact that we are going through an important change. A paradigm shift is taking place in a number of disciplines. One can see, for example, how a number of Marxists are returning to Gramsci's notion of the interregnum, as a way of describing this particular moment – which I think in part is very good, and in part is a cop-out in as much as an interregnum is precisely a moment when people cannot tell what is going on. What I think is fundamentally problematic for anthropology is indeed this major shift from the geographical to the temporal. I mean, at the present time it is not where you are located in space that matters, it's where you are located in time . . . and how do you think about time where you are. What interests me is how to identify how people all over the globe now are thinking about the moment in which they live. That is, what is their conception of their own historicism? What is happening with time within the conditions of globalization, with people referring to notions such as real time and virtual time that are so important in the ways we now operate. However, when we are thinking in terms of space, we used to think of geometrical categories of distance . . . we would be calculating how far this is from that, and so on. The nature of time that we have to think about now is a much more topological notion of time . . . for example, take your handkerchief and just crumple it up, and the crumpling of the handkerchief does not alter the geometrical relationships of the things within the handkerchief, but it produces rather different configurations. There are different folds that bring things together. This is what is happening certainly for various people in different parts of the globe. The handkerchief has been crumpled up in a different way, or in some instances, torn, so that suddenly experiences which they thought could be mediated by very long distances become immediate . . . they have to find ways of talking about that, and describing it, and there is little evidence that there is an available vocabulary for what's happening. It seems to me there are two things that we ought to be doing: one is simply tracking these things and seeing how people are reacting, how they are putting it in their own language, what kind of little stories they are telling themselves. But the other one is asking 'what are the invariant geometric organizations within the topology and then what are the prophecies that this topology is being subjected to at present?' If we can keep track of these two things then we have a possibility of grasping what's going on . . . What is at the heart of all of this is that under conditions of globalization, there is a revaluation of what the local is. The primary concern with one's historicity, placing oneself within historical experience, changes the nature of the sense of location. Location is no longer a spatial notion, but rather an indication of how the invariant of the geometry has been altered in order to constitute the sense of a particular kind of place . . . One should reject all of these discussions that say these are the exclusions, these are the inclusions within processes of globalization. That's nonsense. Everybody is within this process. Globalization means that there is nothing outside of the frame. It means there is no margin. And so all we have to be preoccupied with is what are the forms of the figuration that are taking place within that. And I think that it really doesn't matter whether you do this as an anthropologist and I do this as a comparativist . . . that's why I didn't use 'locality', but rather location – location is always in relation to something else . . . Let me tell you,

for example, how I think of Geneva, because that might be a good way of describing this: Geneva is a very small city of about 180,000 people, and yet it is really a global city. It has a very peculiar function in the world because of the international organizations but also the large number of NGOs that are there, plus the kind of banking that is going on in the city. It is a place where there is forged an international language of reference. In other words, what are claims in specific fields have to come to Geneva to get validated at conferences . . . there are seven expert conferences per day in Geneva. That's the most important activity in that city. And so all claims to knowledge that are dispersed now come to converge . . . and in Geneva this suddenly becomes the language of reference that governments and other international institutions try to introduce and use. I think we need an understanding of various other places in roughly these terms – what they do, what flows through them, how a globally inflected organization takes shape, etc. Geneva has an elegance to it, but really that is not very important. So there is a tourist industry, but what we really need to accommodate are those 735 experts concurrently on different days. That means that there has to be a printing industry, a translation industry, all kinds of things that are organized in that way. And that becomes reproduced in the rest of the society . . . and that produces then other kinds of opportunities . . . you know, secondary or tertiary, and so on. . . .

I think that the kinds of contemporalities that we are dealing with at present are not going to depend on notions of mediation, because notions of mediation essentially try to regulate certain kinds of flows and to reorganize them. That would prove simply inadequate for what we are doing. And I'm afraid that an ethnographic approach is going to finesse this simply by being descriptive at this very moment where in fact it's the moment that requires the most analysis. I think the best model that we have at the moment is that of arbitrage. Arbitrage is the handling of the contemporalities, that's all it is. It is in fact making decisions and it's not negotiating . . .

This is a post-hermeneutic situation, it's not a question of understanding what the causes are . . . but rather, what do you do? The paradigm shift means not that you are actually going to be describing things, but that you are going to start looking at things differently. Methodology is no use right now because a methodology is essentially a blueprint of a road that you are going to follow. Instead, you can only pose certain kinds of goals, expectations, or to give an idea of the extent of the area that you are trying to saturate. All you can do is say, I'm going to take these, these and these factors and I'm going to look at their various combinations and this is where I am going to place my intervention. It is within these moves that you have to be concerned with issues of arbitrage, having to do with the recognition that there are different temporalities. And temporalities in this instance means, in a Deleuzian way, intensities, because what is at the heart of talking about events is, as Deleuze said, disjunctive syntheses. Current events do indeed conjoin and disjoin things, but the significant thing produced in events are new dispersals. You cannot predict what is going to be, or the spread of things. But what you can do by looking at the kinds of intensities and by trying to measure the kinds of intensities is to get a sense of the potential productivity of an event. And this is what those who engage in arbitrage do. If they predict correctly, they survive and make money; if not, they go down. And in some sense, we who are

engaged in thinking in and about the present, whether we want it or not, are cast in a very similar role as the arbitrageur . . .

In conventional cultural analysis with its valorization of the everyday, events were not being considered, the focus on the everyday is a way even of avoiding the notion of the event. But events are these disjunctive syntheses. And they have to be considered. We have to bear in mind that an event is not something that jumps at you, but that you have to construct . . . so it's a relationship. And it is for that reason that anthropology was able to focus on spatial and geographic relations, but the moment it focuses on temporal ones then it has to take into account that notion of event and also avoid falling into the trap of simply hierarchizing events . . . this is an event of world importance . . . whereas this is something about the dog that bit the postman, or something like that . . . We no longer live in a world that can afford perspectivalism of a Nietzschean sort, where perspective was born of this very strong notion of locality – simply, this is my deixis, this is where I'm anchored, this where I do things from. We find ourselves for the time in a situation where, in terms of linguistic categories, we have no deixis. So that language is not taking place . . . this is what virtual means . . . that things no longer take place. What does it mean to no longer have access to that kind of deixis, where when you read an e-mail message, you don't really know what the deixis of that e-mail message is, because it can be routed from so many locations? When I send an e-mail message to people, they think it comes from Geneva, but I'm sending it from South Africa. So what is the deixis of that e-mail message? They have no idea. Increasingly, we will have these abstract addresses where things reach us, but they don't locate us. So we have to think of a system of address. And what we need to do then is to allow what used to be called the native perspective to be a mode of address, a way of entering into a conversation. That's really what a mode of address is, it's a way of entering into a conversation. The best example of that kind of address is in the *Odyssey*, when the dead address the living. It is a moment when Odysseus does not know where he is, and what they are telling him is don't worry where you are on the surface of this water here, that is not what matters. You need to know where you are in time . . . what is your genealogy. And that is what I mean by this mode of addressing. Addressing, again, is a temporal mode of locating oneself, rather than this kind of geographical mode . . .

Notes

1. The sense of this more precise and segmented interdisciplinarity is very evident now. For example, even though in this paper I am evoking the borders between anthropology and geography, I have recently been approached by sociologists who have pursued ethnography in their discipline and who have suggested fusion with the tradition of ethnography in anthropology in the name of the changes impelled by globalization. I would say this sort of proposal to form micro, precise interdisciplinary partnerships is typical of this moment. In general what the cultural turn has legitimated pragmatically are modes of research out of particular disciplinary trainings that are experimental, result in 'messy' texts (see Marcus, 1999a), and put theoretical resources together in unusual ways. The emergence of multi-sited ethnography, discussed in this paper, is very much in this trend. In a review of the recent book by Mary Poovey,

A History of the Modern Fact, John Brewer gives an elegant characterization of this trend that I think is a second wave of interdisciplinarity, grounding the cultural turn in enquiries:

Poovey's wide-ranging and erudite study seems to me to exemplify a growing body of American scholarship that is united not by its subject matter but by what Poovey herself calls 'its mode of argumentation.' Such works written by scholars over the tenure barrier but still far from the twilight zone, share a family resemblance, a common 'poetics.' They are lengthy and learned, formulate an object of analysis that has no obvious place in one discipline, and experimentally apply critical theory rather than produce it. (Brewer, 1999, p. B22)

2. Tangentially, I offer a description of one paradigm for non-obvious multi-sited research. The presentation is abstract but several projects in science studies resemble it (e.g. see Galison, 1997), as do studies of the circulation of activist and political discourses (see Holmes, in press; and Fortun, in press). More specifically, it reflects my own experience of studying dynastic families and fortunes in the United States (see Marcus, 1992). Schematically posed, the paradigm has these features: there is very little actual contact or exchange between two sites but the functioning of one of the sites depends on a very specific imaginary of what is going on elsewhere. The complex nature of the relation between the disjunctive sites, how they are co-ordinated, if they are, is the main objective puzzle of the ethnography. Fieldwork in an initial site is interested primarily in a shared imaginary of a set of subjects derived from attention to situated discourse, as so much ethnography is these days. It is their social cartography or social referents elsewhere within this imaginary that become particularly important. The initial fieldwork in the interest of its multi-sited strategy is looking for a current preoccupation with an elsewhere that bounds a situated imaginary. It is the referent of an imaginary discovered in initial fieldwork that suggests where the fieldwork will literally move and contextualize itself by enquiry in a related site. The fieldwork literally moves then to what the imaginary within the first site refers to or constructs as its dynamic other, and makes a second ethnographic object of study of that referent. Literalness, as a kind of naive realism, in making this move, is, I would argue, both a virtue and provocation of the project. The fieldwork in the second site is often different in nature than in the first site. It is perhaps less intensive than in the first, but always with the first site in mind. It is fieldwork more in the manner of Malinowski than, say, Geertz. The second site is probed for its relation to the first site, and this becomes the foremost question. Is there a reciprocal relation at the level of imaginary or not? Is there a material relation, one of periodic exchange, or is the relation totally virtual? In the second site does the social imaginary there point elsewhere? In what manner? Most interestingly, how does an ethnographic project whose fieldwork stops here at this second site leave itself open, satisfying the practical need to bound the potentially unbounded while leaving the unbounded imagined not as some abstract system but as a further network of sites that could be investigated? The project might end with this analysis and interpretation of the relation or connection of the two sites across disjunction where the imaginary at one site is juxtaposed to the ethnography of its literal referent, but a third phase of such a multi-sited project would define itself as intervention, with some strategy of bringing back the ethnography at the second site to the first site, as a practice of critique, involving re-engagement with one's original subjects from whose imaginaries and regimes of representation the impetus and strategy for moving the project literally elsewhere was derived.

- This paradigm for multi-sited ethnography – distanced from conventional geography – makes its own geography in collaboration with one's subjects. This is a geography forged from the found (and cartographic) imaginaries of subjects and the interests of the mobile curiosity of the ethnographer in relation to them.
3. Wlad Godzich is a very interesting person to be making such claims. He was a key and instrumental figure in making available the crucial theoretical texts to the interdisciplinary movements of the 1970s and 1980s, through the *History and Theory of Literature* series, published by the University of Minnesota Press, and produced through the unique programme in comparative literature that he created at the same university. In the early 1990s, he moved away from a very active role in the 'scene' of the cultural turn in North America (holding simultaneous faculty appointments at Harvard, Minnesota and Montreal), to a professorship in Geneva, understanding perhaps precociously the end of the cultural turn's theoretical moment. During his time in Geneva, he has become a true global scholar, moving between consultancies to 'masters of the universe' – writing reports and position papers for corporations, banks, financiers and policy experts – and producing projects with local scholars in places like South Africa, Brazil, China and Eastern Europe, that gauge the state of emergent literatures, a concept that he first developed at Minnesota. He has thus been developing points of access to contemporary change on the surface of events, in ways that are rhizomic rather than totalistic, that create a symptomology that constitutes a grounded sense of the social and that challenges more orderly perspectives, and improves upon them in so doing.

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More words, more worlds

Reflections on the 'cultural turn' and human geography

Chris Philo

Introduction

Increasingly, it seems, there is a tendency among those closely associated with the 'new' cultural geography to eschew the use of the phrase 'cultural turn', just at the moment it begins to take on a certain solidity within the discipline.

(Barnett, 1998a, p. 379)

Clive Barnett is only half right in this statement, since a number of human geographers, including those contributing to this volume, *are* prepared to talk about a 'cultural turn' now occurring within the discipline.¹ Even so, he is probably correct to identify a certain reticence in this respect, given that talk of a cultural turn implies that one can discern a modicum of unity, of coherence, to this emerging shape within the overall field of human geography. Ron Johnston chooses to use this term for the title of a chapter in the recent edition of his text *Geography and Geographers* (Johnston, 1997, Chap. 8), but he swiftly admits that, rather than there being any obvious 'core' to the developments involved, they are best described simply as 'a series of sometimes interwoven strands coming out of previous approaches' (Johnston, 1997, p. 271).² From the chapters which follow in this book, it will be possible to gain a rich sense of these many 'interwoven strands', and it is very much in the details of these chapters that the value of human geography's cultural turn (and also of cultural studies' 'geographical turn') should become apparent. Nonetheless, it is important that some attempts are made to appreciate the overall direction being taken by this cultural turn, and where appropriate to offer (constructive) criticisms of what has or has not been achieved. And, foolishly, this is a task that I wish to undertake here in helping to set a context for what follows, although in so doing

I must immediately admit to borrowing heavily from the views of others such as Gregson (1993).

I am not intending to provide anything like a panoptic survey of this uneven and shifting intellectual landscape, although relatively comprehensive surveys can be found in pieces already mentioned (Barnett, 1998a; Johnston, 1997, Chap. 8) as well as in Linda McDowell's thoughtful overview (McDowell, 1994)³ and in regular progress reports published in the journal *Progress in Human Geography*. It is important, I feel, to resist the impression of sitting in some kind of satellite circling human geography's cultural turn, claiming the 'scopic power' to see clearly all that is taking place but which others closer by cannot themselves comprehend. In the spirit of what Cindi Katz (1996) has argued about 'minor theory', I wish to offer reflections which are themselves somewhat hesitant, asking questions as much as making definitive judgements, and in so doing I will also be less in praise of self-consciously important position statements and more in sympathy with those very many human geographers with a cultural interest who are now mixing up conceptual elaboration with substantive detail. In addition, my discussion will refer to certain projects familiar to me personally, one of which is particularly significant because it influenced the cultural turn within British human geography during the opening years of the 1990s, and I will also touch upon one or two of my own writings in the process. Given this personal involvement in much that I will cover, the text will inevitably include some first person commentary, observation and judgement, and I hope that this personalized tone will not detract from the broader arguments being advanced. I have also decided to retain the more 'conversational' style originally adopted for the conference paper from which this essay is now derived (see the editors' introduction).

Back in the early 1990s I did have occasion to identify a cultural turn emerging within human geography (Philo, 1991a, p. 3), and the prompt for this remark was a project which became known as the 'New Words, New Worlds' initiative. This initiative was co-ordinated by what was then the Social and Cultural Geography Study Group of the Institute of British Geographers,⁴ and it entailed enlisting inputs from numerous British human geographers of varying backgrounds, career stages, conceptual orientations and substantive concerns. Following through several phases, the initiative culminated in a sizeable conference held in Edinburgh during September 1991, and then in the compiling together of the various inputs (position papers, a discussion document, conference papers and postscripts) for a small desk-top publication entitled *New Words, New Worlds: Reconceptualising Social and Cultural Geography* (Philo, 1991b). One or two authors at the time commented that this initiative bore witness to a new departure in how geographers, or at least British geographers, were dealing with matters of culture (e.g. J.S. Duncan, 1993a, pp. 372–6), and in retrospect similar claims are commonly made about its contribution to a broader cultural turn within the discipline (e.g. Barnett, 1998a, p. 381; Johnston, 1997, pp. 314–15).

A first point to notice, however, is that the initiative was undoubtedly but one straw in a rather larger wind. It certainly did not by itself kick start a wholly

new orientation, since in many respects it simply picked up on a slate of changes (of approach, subject matter, emphasis, style, politics) which were then coursing through (and beyond) the discipline. Indeed, it emerged from the recognition of the Study Group Committee that its members were beginning to think differently about the very objects of 'the social' and 'the cultural' which featured in the name of the Group (and it was only in the late 1980s that the Group changed its name from just 'Social Geography' to 'Social and Cultural Geography': Cosgrove, 1988). The original purpose of the initiative was hence to cast a critical eye over this reconceptualizing of both 'the social' and 'the cultural', and in the process to tease out the implications for what might be taken as the sub-disciplinary fields of both 'social geography' and 'cultural geography'. Elements of this purpose can still be traced in the *New Words* compilation, but with hindsight the main achievement was arguably to heighten our senses of how all things *cultural* might be raised to a much more prominent position in studies throughout the corpus of human geography (and not just in one or two neatly parceled-off subdisciplines). It was to take much more seriously than hitherto all manner of things that might be construed as constituting the cultural 'stuff' of human life, not just phenomena routinely designated as cultural (e.g. 'highbrow' arts and 'lowbrow' media), but also the complete panorama of meaning systems both collective (e.g. religions and nationalisms) and more individual (built up in personal psychic economies).⁵

This was to anticipate the amazingly rich arc of the cultural turn within human geography as it has now arisen: a turn which has obviously had great ramifications for both social and cultural geography, but one too which has undoubtedly sent shockwaves throughout the length and breadth of human geography, leading to debates (more or less explicit, more or less heated) about the merits of a cultural turn within (say) economic geography, political geography, population geography, environmental geography and elsewhere. This is not the place to detail these debates (although see Parts III and IV of this collection), but what I will insist is that it was never the intention of the original initiative to indulge in some kind of 'empire-bilding' on behalf of a reformulated cultural geography. I know that there have been some mutterings of complaint along these lines,⁶ but we are talking here about 'unintended consequences' of our project, albeit consequences that I personally would agree have not always been entirely positive. Let me therefore acknowledge my worry that in certain respects the cultural turn has been *too* successful, has become *too* hegemonic, and has led to the realms of (say) economic and political geography making too many accommodations with a cultural orientation.⁷ This has perhaps meant that human geographers have lost interest in certain domains of (say) economy, politics, demography and nature which arguably should still command our attention because they remain so inescapable in how today's human geographies are pieced together in the world outside of the academy. Moreover, I would go so far as to suggest that the success of the cultural turn is actually now posing a few problems for the study of *social* geography, the subdisciplinary realm which, in Britain at least, initially spawned the present cultural turn. And this is actually a key claim of my paper here: namely, the threat to social geography posed by the cultural turn.