

REFLECTIONS

THE CULTURAL TURN: FASHION OR PROGRESS IN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY?

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The Cultural Turn in Question

How does one approach the cultural turn in human geography? Does the phrase “the cultural turn” imply a far too coherent and singular process, a misnaming of what is in fact a diverse array of intellectual projects? After all, according to Matless (1995:395), “[t]he cultural in geography becomes ever harder to delimit.” If “the cultural” has become so hard to clearly delineate, does it really make any sense to talk of “the” cultural turn? Recent debates have been characterised by accusations and counter-accusations of misrepresentation that might well suggest that the field is not easily reduced to simple positions (e.g., Price and Lewis, 1993; Cosgrove, 1993, 1996; Duncan, 1993; Jackson, 1993, 1996; Mitchell, 1995; Duncan and Duncan, 1996). 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.

I do not claim to have a complete grasp on the range of work touched by the cultural turn, but neither do I think that the complexity of this work disables any and all attempts to subject it, whatever “it” is, to critical scrutiny. And there are ways of establishing the real dimensions of the cultural turn as an intellectual event. Consider, for example, analyses of citation patterns in human geography. These studies clearly indicate a marked shift during the 1980s away from spatial analysis and toward

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political economy perspectives (Bodman, 1991). There now seems to exist a dominant research cohort consisting of a highly integrated "Society and Space" grouping, made up of a number of "blocs" representing several established systematic specialties, such as industrial geography or urban geography. Of most interest is that the early 1990s saw the clear emergence of a new set of "master weavers" who are closely identified with the cultural turn, such as Peter Jackson, Denis Cosgrove, Trevor Barnes, James Duncan, and Jacqueline Burgess (Bodman, 1997:10). Bodman goes so far as to argue that this development "provides clear evidence of a restructuring of the intellectual space of human geography. Traditional cultural geography has been supplanted and the new cultural geography has been created close to the centre of the [Society and Space] network" (Bodman, 1995:52). Extensive exercises in citation counting seem to provide a certain degree of "objective" evidence that the cultural turn has very rapidly secured a central position in the higher echelons of human geography's research elite.

From a far more anecdotal perspective, the impact of these developments is registered in the newly acquired public visibility of geography, typified by newspaper commentaries that amuse themselves by contrasting geography's staid old image with its newly discovered sexiness: "The Death of the Anorak" (*The Observer*, 17 April 1994); "Space Cadets Get Post-Modern Stress" (*The Observer*, 2 July 1995). Interestingly, such journalistic commentaries often fail to distinguish between professional geographers and other academics and intellectuals. From the perspective of these sorts of stories, geography and a wider field of cultural studies are becoming indistinguishable.

The cultural turn has many manifestations. Even as a summary, the following list is hardly exhaustive: a revivification of traditional areas of interest in cultural geography under the influence of new theoretical ideas; the "textualisation" of subfields such as political geography; the revival of interest in the historiography of geography under the influence of theories of colonial discourse and postcolonialism; a concern for the "cultural" embeddedness of economic processes; an interest in examining the mobilisation of culture as an accumulation strategy; a greater concern for examining relations between identity and consumption; an ever-greater sophistication in understandings of the construction of social relations of gender and race as well as class; a focus upon cultural constructions of environment and nature. Perhaps one common thread connecting these and other myriad projects is a commitment to epistemologies, often loosely labelled "poststructural," that emphasise the contingency of knowledge claims and recognise the close relationship among language, power, and knowledge. Both epistemologically and in the construction of new empirical research objects, the cultural turn is probably best characterised by a heightened reflexivity toward the role of language, meaning, and representations in the constitution of "reality" and knowledge of reality.

If one wanted to date the moment of the cultural turn or the emergence of a "new" cultural geography, then one would look no further than the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is in this period that one sees the proliferation of programmatic and theoretical statements on the "new" cultural geography (e.g., Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987; Duncan and Duncan, 1988; Daniels, 1989; Jackson, 1989), of special issues of journals devoted to themes such as "Culture's Geographies" (*Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6[2]), and of new substantive empirical work (e.g., Daniels and Cosgrove, 1988; Duncan, 1990; Barnes and Duncan, 1992). All of these developments have been backed up by conferences and institutional developments, such as the Institute of British Geographers Social and Cultural Geography Group's "initiative" on "de-limiting human geography" (Philo et al., 1991). In perusing the benchmark texts and articles, what rapidly becomes clear is the extent to which the cultural turn has involved a major reorientation of human geography toward new disciplinary interlocutors (Gregory, 1994:5). The cultural turn needs, then, to be located within the wider set of debates that emerged in the late 1980s around postmodernism, which in large part were the vehicles for geography's entry into new fields of cultural theory. And this connection also points toward the close relationship that exists between the emergence of new forms of cultural analysis in human geography and a growing disaffection with the particular form of geography's Marxism that had acquired theoretical hegemony in geography in the 1970s and 1980s.

Of course, the embracing term "cultural turn" hides some significant differences within and between particular fields. McDowell (1994) prefers to talk of new cultural geographies, loosely distinguishing between a "cultural materialism" strand and a "new landscape school." Peter Jackson (1993:519) distinguishes among the work of the three writers who seem to have become most closely identified with the new cultural geography, in emphasising the differences among "Cosgrove's landscape iconography, Duncan's literary post-structuralism, and my own brand of 'cultural politics.'" As well as differences in favoured objects of research and theoretical influences, there is also a geography to the cultural turn. It is commonplace to distinguish broadly between a North American strand with important lines of continuity to an existing subdiscipline of cultural geography as well as to humanistic geography and a British scene where cultural geography's "newness" is more obvious and where its development is closely related to the reshaping of social geography. There are also significant connections with work in Australia and New Zealand (e.g., Anderson and Gale, 1992), and all of this work is in turn being picked up elsewhere (e.g., Badenhorst, 1992). The "new" cultural geography and "the cultural turn" are, then, international developments. Whatever the problems in pinning the cultural turn down in precise intellectual terms, it is clear that something has happened to human geography recently and that this something is related to the ascendancy of cultural theory not just

in human geography but also as the glue for a series of overlapping interdisciplinary projects.

In what follows, by trying to establish the theoretical significance of the conditions for the contemporary circulation of cultural theory, I want to identify one particular issue upon which the implications of the cultural turn might be opened up to critical judgement. The starting point for the argument of this paper is that the production of new research in human geography under the broad umbrella of the cultural turn has been in no small part dependent upon the transmission of knowledge from other disciplinary fields. In itself, this is not peculiar to recent developments. The interdisciplinarity represented by "the cultural turn" does, however, rely on particular means of knowledge transmission. In what follows, I shall focus upon the relationship between human geography and cultural studies, a field that has exerted such a powerful attraction to geographers since the 1980s, and on how this relationship has been mediated in large part by distinctive forms of academic publishing. One of the attractions, for me at least, of cultural studies is the acute sense of institutional reflexivity that much of this work displays. The appropriation of cultural and literary theory in human geography routinely effaces this characteristic (Barnett, 1997).

In focussing upon this relationship, I want to speculate about two related issues. First, I will suggest there is a tendency inscribed within the cultural turn to promote distinctive modes of personalised authority, which have an ambivalent potential. These are promoted and supported by particular institutional networks of knowledge dissemination. The second issue I want to keep in view is whether or not the rude intrusion of cultural studies not only promotes new modes of authority, but also forces us to question the standard ways in which we might be tempted to judge this very fact. One of the positive features of cultural studies lies in its opening up of the whole question of evaluation (Readings, 1996). If we are to take cultural studies seriously, then we need to think about how distinctive modes of authority might disrupt the forms of evaluation that tend to be marshalled against this field. I want to keep this second line of thought in mind, in the hope that it will help to negotiate the small space that separates the all-too-easy dismissal of new intellectual trends from the equally easy uncritical embrace of them.

The Diffusion of "Culture"

Whatever their merits as accurate descriptions of intellectual developments, the phrases "new cultural geography" and "the cultural turn" have certainly taken on a certain solidity in discussions of the current state of the discipline. They have rapidly become essential reference points for any attempt to narrate the contemporary situation. A little bit like the

"quantitative revolution," a rhetorical usage has begun to take on the appearance of actual fact. And like that previous "turn," there is an important relationship between the emergence of this new "paradigm" and the rhythms and imperatives of commercial academic publishing. Publishing is crucial in establishing the patterns of circulation and distribution for academic work and thus for securing the scope and form of audiences and publics for such work (Stevenson, 1993).¹ The "new" cultural geography and the cultural turn are currently being consolidated in the form of a new journal of cultural geography, *Ecumene*. A new journal of feminist geography, *Gender, Place, and Culture*, indicates in its name the importance that "the cultural" has taken on in redefining what geography is about, not just for geographers but for other fields as well. These new outlets for research augment the increased presence of work inflected by the cultural turn in established research journals. Even *Geographical Analysis* has carried an article on postmodernism (Hannah and Strohmayer, 1995)! Furthermore, the cultural turn is being consolidated in widely read texts aimed explicitly at student audiences. The third edition of Blackwell's *Dictionary of Human Geography* (Johnston et al., 1993) manifests the recent intellectual shifts in human geography, with its new entries on topics such as "Post-structuralism," "Text," "Cultural Capital," "Cultural Politics," "Discourse," and "Subjectivities." A new introductory text on cultural geography has been published (Shurmer-Smith and Hannam, 1994), and the "new" cultural geography and the cultural turn are given prominence in a new series of introductory readers published by Arnold (Barnes and Gregory, 1997; Daniels and Lee, 1996; McDowell and Sharp, 1997). The follow-up to the Institute of British Geographers' Women and Geography Study Group's path-breaking introductory text to feminist geography, in its pluralisation of feminisms and geographies, differences and diversities, clearly registers the epistemological transformations that have reshaped human geography and of which the cultural turn is a crucial part (cf. Women and Geography Study Group, 1984, 1997). Perhaps most notable of all is the inclusion of a chapter on "The Cultural Turn" in the latest edition of Johnston's *Geography and Geographers* (1997), a standard reference work for undergraduate courses on both sides of the Atlantic. When it gets in here, you know it must be important.

We should not underestimate the importance of this moment for the future of the "new" cultural geography and the cultural turn. It seems to mark the point at which innovative research work is being translated into accessible materials aimed at making this work more widely available and teachable. This process of translation between research and teaching through the medium of textbook publishing is critical to the dissemination and institutionalisation of new "paradigms." The cultural turn even appears to sit well with Bodman's (1996) suggestion that the lag between the opening of new research horizons and the appearance of new teaching texts is about six or seven years. The appearance of these and other

student-oriented texts is taking place at the same time as the academic publishing industry is undergoing a widespread reorientation toward publishing textbooks and middle-range "coursebooks" for pedagogic purposes. The corporate restructuring of the publishing sector and the virtual disappearance of the previously assured university-library market for research monographs has encouraged a greater emphasis upon student-focussed book publishing among academic publishers.² My concern in highlighting this connection between the cultural turn and the practices of commercial academic publishing is not to make the empty claim that new intellectual trends are merely the products of the logic of capitalist profitability. I want, instead, to consider how examining this relation might help us to identify an important shift in the regimes of authorization through which academic communication is structured.

The widespread engagement by human geographers with cultural theory, which really took off from the late 1980s onward, coincided with the internationalisation of cultural studies and especially with its institutionalisation in the North American academy. The circulation and distribution of cultural studies on an international scale are in no small part dependent on the activities of publishers. Given its eccentric relation to established academic networks, cultural studies has always had a close relationship with innovative commercial publishing ventures. One thinks of Penguin, which made the work of writers like Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and E. P. Thompson widely available to a large nonacademic reading public in the 1960s; of New Left Books, subsequently Verso; or the successful commercialisation of Open University course texts. The intimate connection between publishing and the "Atlanticisation" of cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s is perhaps best exemplified by the case of Routledge. The product of multiple mergers and takeovers and a thorough design revamp (see Newell and Sorrell, 1995), Routledge in the 1990s has become a dynamic academic publisher by using trade publishing methods to market academic books. Its commitment to the promotion of cultural studies is typified by an in-house publication, *The Cultural Studies Times*, heralded as a "post-disciplinary intervention," which carries articles by major cultural studies academics alongside advice to librarians on how to ensure that cultural studies becomes more than just "a passing fad." Routledge has also been one important vehicle for the presentation of new work by human geographers to a wider interdisciplinary cultural studies audience (e.g., Keith and Pile, 1993, 1997; Bell and Valentine, 1995; Pile and Thrift, 1996).

The close identification between Routledge and the internationalisation of cultural studies indicates that the staging of academic work as "cultural studies" offers an opportunity for widening the potential market for academic books beyond the constraints of disciplinary specialties. A generalised "cultural studies" seems, in fact, to accord quite well with the peculiar economic imperatives that characterise all cultural

commodities. It provides a means of maximising audiences by facilitating a cross-disciplinary expansion of the potential market for texts re-labelled “cultural studies”; in turn, risk can be spread across a varied repertoire of numerous titles; and, as a product that opens up ever-expanding horizons of new reading assignments, it answers to the need to constantly create new products (Garnham, 1987). To put it bluntly, “cultural studies” in the 1990s is, in part at least, an accumulation strategy. There is an obvious temptation at this point to lay claim to some pure space unsullied by commodification from which to dismiss this new intellectual development as merely the product of clever marketing. But just when hasn’t academic knowledge been wrapped up with commodification? The example of the assertive marketing of “cultural studies” by Routledge actually reveals rather well the mould-breaking potential of certain sorts of commercialised forms of knowledge dissemination. Having identified this relationship between new forms of intellectual work and the dynamics of academic publishing, I want to move the terms of critical discussion onto a more specific and somewhat more ambiguous terrain.

Reconfiguring Authority

What specifically interests me here is how this connection points up some important transformations in the norms of academic judgement in human geography that the cultural turn might herald. As Boynton (1995: 28) suggests, Routledge’s strategy of “niche marketing to the interdisciplinary crowd” is of importance because it encourages and supports a reconfiguration of modes of scholarly evaluation and forms of academic authority. It can be argued that books and journals represent distinctive regimes of evaluation for academic writing. The different imperatives regulating these two forms of academic publication mean that the gate-keeping functions that regulate access to academic journals, which tend to follow more closely along the lines of “normal science,” can be circumvented by assertive book publishers (cf. Boots, 1996; Johnston, 1996). For this reason, in the right circumstances books tend to play a significant role in facilitating forms of cross-disciplinary communication that can shift patterns of research and scholarship within particular disciplines (Clemens et al., 1995).

The relation between the expansion of cultural studies and publishing is neatly summed up by Davies (1995:159), who observes the characteristic way that cultural studies is launched into new arenas “through conferences, and conferences which are put together in such a manner that the proceedings are being structured as textbooks, even before the conference takes place: the performances are orchestrated, dialogue is ‘conducted,’ the score is edited in advance.” The exemplary case of this is Grossberg et

al.'s (1992) edited collection *Cultural Studies*, a follow-up of sorts to the earlier *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Grossberg and Nelson, 1988), which is a basic starting point for any aspiring cultural studies scholar in the 1990s. Langbauer (1993) has argued that the very form and packaging of this text reveal the existence of a celebrity-economy of international cultural studies. The attraction of this book, its selling-point, and its authority lie in the number of big-name "theory-heads" collected within its covers.

Again, we need to be careful here to avoid easily dismissive gestures. As Jay (1990) suggests, the personification of theoretical ideas appears to be constitutive of the very nature of theory in the humanities and social sciences. The proper names "Marx" and "Freud," as Foucault (1986:113–117) points out, have long functioned as crucial signifiers for whole areas of critical discussion. There seems to be an inherent ambivalence between personal and anonymous forms of authority that underlie social and cultural theory. Citation as "name-dropping," for example, is not just about showing off the latest book you've read, but an important part of acknowledging debts and, through this, one marker of the collective nature of academic inquiry. Even in the sciences, notions of anonymous authority tend to function as regulative ideals at best. If the personification of theory is not particularly new, then, my suggestion here is that its dimensions might be altering. Following Warner (1992), one can suggest that the nature of academic public spheres has been transformed through the emergence of identity politics, which have challenged the authority of disembodied reason as the model of public authority. In its place, there is a heightened importance of the explicit marking of embodied identity (Jay, 1993). This presages a form of authority that makes visible its own conditionality. It is potentially at least a form of authority that actively invites questioning as to its own legitimacy. What this shift implies is that, with an increasingly mobile international conference circuit allied to assertive forms of academic publishing, what has become central to modes of authority in the ever more diffuse field of cultural studies is not just the rhetorical personification of ideas, but their "actual" personification in "real" people, with not just names but faces and especially personal biographies. It is in this (quite serious) sense that one can begin to talk of the rise of new forms of academic celebrity in the modern academy (Wicke, 1994).³

Cultural theory is, in no small part, literary theory on the move, and thus it drags with it the distinctive features of a new "star system" that itself distinguishes contemporary literary "theory" from earlier forms of literary "criticism." Discussing this matter, Shumway (1997:97) points out the irony that lies behind the increasing importance of identifiable personalities in the circulation of "theory": "As theory has called into question the traditional means by which knowledge has been authorised, it may be that the construction of the individual personality has

become an epistemological necessity." While this point is made with regard to shifts of emphasis within the literary humanities, I think one could make much the same argument with respect to the possible implications of the cultural turn in human geography. Insofar as this moment represents an attempt to finally sever human geography from the supposedly baleful influence of positivism, it depends upon the sophisticated theoretical undermining of forms of authority based on objective claims of Methodology or Technique. Once again, I do not want to underestimate the importance of this sort of critique, whose development in geography might well confirm Robbins' (1988) suggestion that the "political" purchase of literary theory lies in its making possible the demystification of claims to objectivity in disciplines where this really matters. Nonetheless, insofar as this critique depends upon the reorientation of interdisciplinary attention toward the humanities, one can legitimately suggest that this move might confirm Shumway's point. For the humanities are arguably one of the bulwarks, perhaps even the "last bastion," of a classical conception of authorship as the unique, original intellectual production of a unique, individual self (Woodmansee, 1994a:25). The rise of academic celebrity reinforces the well-established difficulty of acknowledging and practising more collective and collaborative forms of academic writing. In the effacement of the collective conditions of academic work, a highly individualised notion of authorship-as-celebrity thus occludes what one might call the "organic composition" of theory's cultural capital.⁴ Conceptions of authorship derived from the literary humanities, which might otherwise be in the process of being superseded by technological and social transformations in the production and dissemination of knowledge, are nonetheless consolidated as the regulatory frame for reading and writing because of their continuing influence in the shaping of law (Parrinder and Chernaik, 1997). This conception of authorship is tied up with the strategies of restriction and containment upon which the commodification of cultural commodities, including books, depends (Gaines, 1991).⁵

The emergence of the newly personified epistemological authority of theory also has consequences for the temporality of intellectual development. Models of "progress" premised upon the refinement of theoretical understandings in relation to empirical work are being replaced by a new dynamic. "Theory" is a seemingly endless, expanding, and self-referential field: "Theory presents itself as a diabolical assignment of difficult readings from fields one knows little about, where even the completion of an assignment will bring not respite but further more difficult assignments" (Culler, 1990:1569). This peculiarity accounts, in part, for the sense in which progress in the fields of human geography most touched by "culture" has come to be characterised by the successive discovery of new, ever more sexy theorists. Theorists who are cool and cutting-edge at one moment are declared *passé* the next (Mohan, 1995). The anchoring of

epistemological authority more closely to the proper names of celebrity academics might therefore go some way toward explaining the heightened sense of arbitrariness that seems to characterise the shifting horizons of theoretical curiosity in critical human geography these days. But at the same time, the anchoring of theory to proper names serves as a way of controlling the bewildering effects of theory's profusion. The authority of exotic theorists is mobilised in order to settle an argument in one's own discipline, a move that typically erases the contested qualities of the fields from which such work itself emerges (Robbins, 1987). The invocation of the authority of the named theorist as final authority serves as a substitute for argument both with disciplinary colleagues and with the work so invoked, whose authority must remain intact for it to do its work in the host discipline. Interdisciplinary appropriation as the "systematic passing of the buck" (Robbins, 1987:96) works to reinstall conventional forms of disciplinary authority and mastery into fields that loudly declare their transgression of disciplinary boundaries.

Geography has always had its own favoured academic personalities, of course. What is perhaps new about the present conjuncture is how some of them have recently been swept into international circuits of academic celebrity, a move that is dependent less upon internal disciplinary modes of evaluation than on the shifting imperatives of knowledge dissemination that I have discussed above. What I am trying to capture here is the way in which the cultural turn in human geography involves a turn toward a set of disciplines in which distinctive individualised modes of authority are predominant. These modes are being bolstered through the very institutional arrangements whereby literary and cultural theory travel. As cultural theory becomes ever more closely connected to celebrity figures, then so in turn the relationship between theory and its audiences is reordered into one that resembles the relationship between stars and fans. Dedicated followers of fashion hurry to buy the new Judith Butler or Bruno Latour book, an act of discernment and discrimination that starkly reveals the truism that identity is constructed in and through the consumption of commodities. Fandom as the corollary of the rise of academic celebrity has implications for the ways in which theoretical ideas are discussed, criticised, and evaluated. This reordered relationship has been rather neatly captured by Gregory (1996) in the description of the "grand parade" of theorists, whereby readers are positioned "as so many spectators along a grand processional route." What I am suggesting here is that the grand parade as a mode of theoretical exegesis might be best understood not simply as a choice of writing style, but rather as a determined pattern related to the means through which cultural theory has come to be institutionalised on an international scale. And for this very reason, it might be much more difficult to take one's distance from this form of presentation of theoretical ideas.

Fashioning Human Geography

I seem to be spiralling toward an all-too-predictable conclusion: that the cultural turn is merely a product of the intensified commodification of academic knowledge, a mere trend, and that its favoured theorists are fancy celebrities whose stars will quickly burn themselves out. But it is just this sort of reassuring representation that I want to disrupt. We need to be able to address the embeddedness of academic work in institutional networks without invoking a fantasy of intellectual autonomy. Ideals of aesthetic and intellectual autonomy, contrasted to the instrumentality of the world of commodities, emerged historically in defensive reaction to the simultaneous commodification and democratisation of culture and education (Woodmansee, 1994b). For this reason, gestures that fall back on such ideals tend to unconsciously reproduce classical dualisms between degraded utilitarian knowledge used for instrumental purposes and critical knowledge that is autonomous from particular worldly interests. The freedom and autonomy that are supposed to underwrite properly critical reflection are, on closer inspection, the condition for the reproduction of standard forms of intellectual authority (Hindess, 1995).

Thinking of theory as “fashion” actually holds out the promise of alternative modes of judgement, less tied to traditional forms of academic authority that are constitutively opposed to the popularisation of critical ideas. Theories as fashion are not merely fleeting, but are marked by a pattern of repetition whereby the succession of styles is always on the verge of rehabilitating what seemed to have been consigned to the past. “Progress” can be refigured as a perpetual process of returning to old styles and reworking them anew in the light of contemporary concerns. Theory as fashion also suggests a practice whose dynamic is detached from the designs of a few select individuals, but is instead moved from the bottom up by the multiple interests and myriad choices of numerous individuals and groups. Thinking of theory as fashion might open up a series of vertiginous questions that are usually not asked about what forms of identification and desire are at work in academic research, scholarship, and writing. No doubt other lines of metaphorical flight suggest themselves, which I shall not pursue here. What I want to suggest here is simply that claims as to significance and urgency of “the cultural turn” cannot, in good faith, be articulated by appealing to standard narratives of intellectual progress. Perhaps the cultural turn is best thought of as just a symptom of a more fundamental rupture in the intellectual and political norms of judgement that regulate academic work.

Before I finally extricate myself from this tangled web, I want to address the relation between new forms of authority and questions of evaluation. I should not overstate my case: the modes of authority discerned above are more tendencies or potentials than they are yet actualities in human geography. In fact, it seems that norms of evaluation in

academic geography remain largely unchanged “after” the cultural turn. The treatment of theory in human geography continues to follow a familiar pattern of appropriation of favoured theoretical postulates and their application to empirical cases, usually accompanied by the obligatory comments about inadequate conceptualisations of space or place. The cultural turn is primarily—and this is an obvious but important point—a move in a game internal to the discipline of geography. The question is whether this move shifts the rules of the game in any significant way. To a considerable extent, the magical object “culture” has helped to construct a culturally inflected geography that continues to differentiate and identify itself by reference to its standard thematic concerns with landscape, place, and space. This reflects the continuing imperative to seek legitimacy for new work within the disciplinary field, a process that tends to take place through a circuit of journal publishing that we might suppose works toward the maintenance of disciplinary standards. The cultural turn has thus been marked by the same sort of “disciplinary anxiousness” that Bonnett (1996) finds in other subfields. Clinging to “the geographical,” “the spatial,” or even “the environmental” is one way of managing the anxiety that comes when faced with an essentially un-“masterable” field of cultural theory. This is our ticket to entry, it is what we offer and how we recognise possible interlocutors, but it also enables us to retain a vestige of continued control over the potentially vast areas offered up by interdisciplinary adventures.

This form of appropriation underwrites human geography’s characteristic oscillation between bursts of theoretical discovery and calls for more empirical investigation. The cultural turn seems to be moving into such a moment just now, judging anecdotally at least from recent Internet discussion lists and the concerns aired at various conferences. The danger in this “empirical turn” is that the authority of certain readings of big-name theory-heads are put beyond question as we agree that we need to see how all this stuff plays itself out on the ground. In this imminent moment of theoretical closure, the authority of theory with a capital “T” is reproduced, as are the evaluative standards that demand that such work needs to be supplemented by a dose of geographical imagination and some good, hearty empirical work. What is really needed is not more empirical work, but a change in practices of doing theory along the lines of Katz’s suggested (1996) “minor theory.” As I understand it, this should not be mistaken for theoretically informed empirical work, but refers to a practice yet to be fully imagined of doing theory in a “different register,” which would disrupt the established economy of value linking the theoretical and the empirical. One of the prerequisites of any such practice is making the effort to avoid the temptations and ruses of mastery that often characterise theory games. Minor theory would be less fluent and less certain in its judgements, but it would not avoid theoretical reflection in the name of grounding authority in the empirical.

In conclusion, I want to suggest that human geography has found it easy to appropriate the authority of cultural studies because it has done so from within established patterns of disciplinary legitimisation. What remains to be thought through are the positive and negative implications of new forms of personalised authority for these practices of evaluation.

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Notes

1. My discussion certainly does not exhaust the range of factors that might help explain current intellectual interests in human geography. Nonetheless, it does seem appropriate to put the question of publishing at the centre of any such analysis.
2. For further considerations of the relationships between intellectual agendas and changes in the academic publishing industry, see Barnett and Low (1996a, 1996b).
3. The rise of academic celebrity is perhaps best indicated by the proliferation of a distinctively new genre of academic writing—the published interview with the celebrity theorist. Originally a distinctively French genre, in which the rise to celebrity status of the likes of Sartre or Foucault relied upon circuits of publicity that were at best marginal to the academy (Debray, 1981), the interview as a more recent feature in English-language academic books and journals indicates that the rise of Anglo-American academic celebrity remains to a much greater extent dependent upon and contained within established circuits of academic publicity.
4. At this point, I should note the temptation to turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1988) to explain the rise of academic celebrity. However, Bourdieu's analysis is limited not only by its empirical context of the French academic system, but more importantly by the theoretical insistence upon treating institutional networks of cultural capital as essentially closed systems of prestige and value (Frow, 1995). Consequently, Bourdieu's is a deeply conservative vision, which in turn encourages a certain degree of cynicism that I would like to avoid as much as possible.
5. I do not suggest that the particular imperatives of commercialised commodity-book production are the sole, or even the most important, determinant of this conception of authorship. It is, of course, an inherent feature of the forms of professionalism that characterise academic careers. Nonetheless, we should acknowledge the degree of "fit" between the individualised norms of academic professionalism and the interests of academic publishers operating in a significantly more commercialised and competitive market. And in so doing, we should resist simplistic gestures of moralistic disavowal.

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