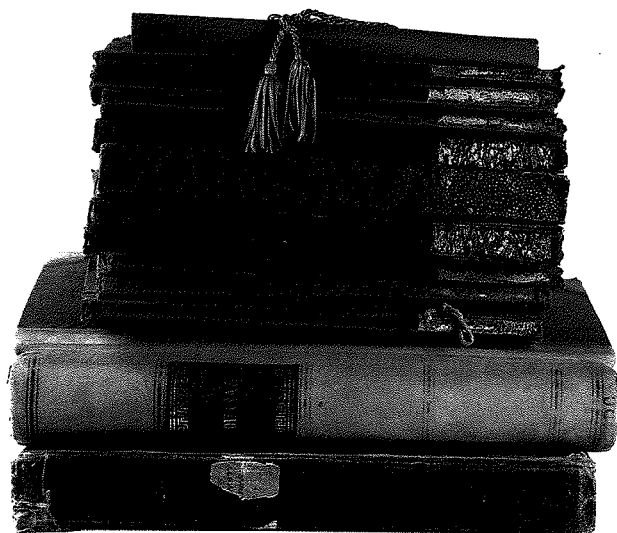# PRACTISING THE ARCHIVE

Reflections on Method and Practice in Historical Geography

Edited by

Elizabeth Gagen, Hayden Lorimer and Alex Vasudevan

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Contents

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Practising the archive: some introductory remarks

Elizabeth Gagen, Hayden Lorimer and Alex Vasudevan

Context

In recent years there have been a number of texts exploring the range of methodological approaches to cultural geographical enquiry. While historical 'matters' have undoubtedly been addressed in a variety of ways, a sustained and multifaceted treatment of the *practice* of historical geography remains conspicuously absent.[1]

The essays included in this latest volume of the **Historical Geography Research Group** (HGRG) monograph series go some way towards filling the gap. They bring together a number of historical geographers, in reflective mode, and sometimes meditative mood. The essays are not designed along the lines of a standard scholarly article. Shorter in length, and arguably a little lighter in tone, they present an occasion for questions of method in historical geography to be drawn through the various entanglements of research. Some authors chose to articulate ideas through more personal reflections on conduct, others by explaining how wider social and political commitments fold back into their research. Each essay offers a variety of critical observations about diverse forms of archival *encounter*, and of how changing conceptual approaches to the practical conducting of historical geography can alter the researcher's relationship with source materials.

In introducing the volume, it is appropriate to note that each of the essayists has in recent years been a contributing speaker to the 'Practicing Historical Geography' conference, arranged annually by the HGRG (of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers). Since its inception, the conference program has dedicated a space to workshop sessions where postgraduate and undergraduate delegates are introduced to different aspects of historico-geographical practice. The popularity of this element of the conference prompted members of the HGRG committee to begin planning for the production of a short volume dealing with different ways of doing research in historical geography. The Research Group's own monograph series seemed the most appropriate home for publication of the volume, ensuring that it can be distributed widely, at modest expense to our members, and made available for purchase by non-members. The collected essays are intended for a wide readership; reflecting the mix of graduate students, academic staff, researchers and non-professional historical researchers that make up the HGRG membership. Our thanks are extended to all those students and academic staff who contributed to the original workshop versions of the essays included here.

As Robert Mayhew notes in this volume, it is over twenty five years since the last major edited collection concerning method in historical geographical research – Alan Baker's and Mark Billinge's *Period and Place* (1982) – was published.[2] Looking back at that text, there are, of course, a number of technical matters which remain central to the conduct of historical geography. The final section of *Period and Place* focuses on "Historical Sources and Techniques" and includes, for example, chapters on private archives, cartographic representation, land use surveys, and field study.[3] While these approaches undoubtedly speak to the historical nature of evidentiary material, recent attempts to *enliven* historical geographical enquiry have been characterised by a more creative and inclusive engagement with a wide range of sources. In this respect, it is obvious that the 'cultural turn' and poststructuralist criticism more broadly have played a key role in the development of new methodological vocabularies among new generations of historical and cultural geographers. And yet, the fact that approaches to

sources have drawn on a varied host of philosophical intercessions from Foucauldian New Historicism and Derridean Deconstruction to non-representational forms of Phenomenology does not *eo ipso* imply a crude pro forma mode of empiricism. If anything, we have inherited ways of doing historical geography that are themselves historically embedded and locally practiced.

With this in mind, it is not our intention to provide a detailed overview of the geographical literature on historical methodology nor do we wish to set out the contours for a single unifying approach to the study of documentary evidence. This literature already includes, among other things, work on the nature of archival practices[4], the materiality of historical 'texts'[5], the study of visual records[6], the encounter with historical objects both human and non-human[7], the historical spaces of biography[8], and the *eventfulness* of historical embodiment and performance[9]. If the majority of these examples are not strictly methodological in their remit, one of the main aims of this volume is to provide a coherent and focused introduction to the *practicing* of historical geography.

We are not, to be sure, advocating a strict empiricism. As Gerry Kearns' essay in this collection makes abundantly clear, historical scholarship is often most effective when it makes claims on how we come to understand our own 'present'. Indeed, writing historical geographies of the present, as numerous commentators have pointed out, has become an increasingly pressing predicament as geographers seek to engage and critically reflect on the different spaces through which the predations of violence and uneven development are abroad in the world.[10] The political possibilities of historical geographical work are, of course, numerous and the six essays which follow show how historical geographers' attentions continue to be diversely spaced and timed. Subjects existing within different historical periods are subject to consideration, rather than efforts made to consider the entirety of any historical period. However, key commonalities of intellectual conduct and concern remain.

Historical geographers have long been concerned with *sources* and *evidence* in respect of *method*. Here, additional sorts of concern crop up. The value of *theory*, the purpose of *narrative*, the place and performance of *politics* and the nature of *encounters* with the archive are each addressed. In different measure, and in different relation, these core concerns are drawn into particular sorts of arrangement.

The essays in the volume cannot boast comprehensive coverage of the fields of inquiry or time periods currently researched by historical geographers. Nevertheless, all essays consider how partiality is a primary feature in the practicing of research on aspects of the past. Either through the (un)availability of sources, the negotiation of absent, powerful or powerless voices in the archive, or the immaterial qualities of certain kinds of historical source. More specifically, we would like to offer the following thematics as a rough and ready guide through the contributions in this volume.

The 'liveness' of the archive

The contributions of DeSilvey and Lorimer are motivated, in part, by a desire to rethink the methods that historical geographers have traditionally relied on in their use of archival documents. At some point, most of us have found ourselves studying historical documents. We are expected to closely examine the printed or written text and subject it to textual analysis and interpretation. In this respect, we are inevitably confronted with the predicament of positivist historiography famously described by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, namely how to confront the obdurate set of beliefs which have clustered around the idea of the archive as the repository of all things already colonized by discourse and representation.[11] But haven't we all wondered whether the documents in front of us – the microfiche coil, the newspaper article, the faint letter – retained those traces which in themselves, were often

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non-verbal, gestural, and performative, or which said in silence something other than what was actually printed.

And yet, as historical geographers we are confronted with a distinct methodological problem, namely that performances and practices are themselves marked by a constitutive absence. The passage of time erodes the 'presence' of past performances and we must, by necessity, forgo any claims to the possibility of recovering in fullness the realm of lived gesture, touch, and emotion.[12] We must also, in some measure, accept Peggy Phelan's point that 'to attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself…'.[13] And yet, if performances are for Phelan always in a state of appearing and vanishing, she also insists on the possibility of working with their historical remainders. As the essays by DeSilvey and Lorimer suggest there are many creative ways to engage with existing 'representational' sources as conveyors of historical 'performance' in its immediacy and evanescence.[14]

Materiality, plans and the printed word

Recent work in the humanities has increasingly drawn attention to the *historical embeddedness* of the printed word and how different texts are themselves produced, circulated, and read.[15] Geographical scrutiny has centred, in no small part, on the hermeneutics of reading and the variegated spaces through which texts are 'differently read by their audiences'.[16] Despite a growing historical sensitivity to the cultural geographies of textual circulation, reading and reception, less attention has been directed to the historically contingent processes through which different forms of writing are indeed made and deployed.[17] This is a point seized on by Mayhew who argues in this volume for 'an historical approach to printed evidence' which focuses on how we attend to and make sensible historically specific 'systems of authorship and book production'. This is also a point taken up by Keighren whose essay on the *everydayness* of disciplinary

geography highlights the relationship between the archive as a repository of mundane textual artifacts and the 'commonplace detail of past geographers' lives'. For Edwards and Gilbert, correspondences between printed text and schematic plans are never a settled matter, even when the two feature on the same page. Working with architectural and planning design documents from 1960s London, they consider the form and function of diagrams, models and drawings when in close relation to the written word. Visual representations, now a familiar source of evidentiary material within cultural and historical geography, are re-worked to show greater sensitivity to the creative *process*, and disclose the mediated and public spaces existing between architectural fact and fantasy.

Life-Geographies

Keighren is also interested in charting the role of biography in re-thinking the disciplinary history of geography. There is admittedly a long tradition of biographic scholarship within geography[18] and while such work has been traditionally criticized on methodological grounds, recent geographical interventions, most notably among geographers interested in the historical geography of scientific practice, have attempted to recast the epistemic underpinnings of past lives. As David Livingstone has recently argued, 'according greater sensitivity to the space of a life could open new and revealing ways of taking the measure of a life'.[19] For Livingstone, cultivating a new form of geographical biography was itself a methodological imperative; one where charting the value of *locational particulars* becomes a real *desideratum*. If Keighren's essay revisits the traffickings between quotidian events and institutional experiences in the context of disciplinary historiography, Lorimer's essay speaks to the different ways in which we can come to accommodate, inhabit, and write about the minutiae of the past. Kearns demonstrates how a life within historical scholarship is simultaneously a means of political commitment and personal expression.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] The most recent contribution being the essays and commentaries collected in a special issue of *Historical Geography* **29** (2001) dedicated to matters of practice.

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[12] H. Lorimer, *Telling small stories*; H. Lorimer, *The geographical fieldcourse*

[13] P. Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance* (London, 1993) 148.

[14] H. Lorimer, *Telling small stories* 203

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Taking Theory for a Walk in Ireland

Gerry Kearns

Politics and Theory

I argue here[1] that politics, theory and research are inter-related and I illustrate this talking a little about how the recent discussion by geographers of some of the work of Agamben might frame empirical research on the historical geography of political relations between the peoples of Ireland and Britain.[2] Historical scholarship very often makes claims upon our understanding of our present situation. To pursue what Dean, writing of Foucault, calls *Critical and Effective Histories*, we try to explain how the historical record suggests the contingency of the present.[3] We must attend to the possibilities, once closed by events, that might yet be imagined and struggled for anew. Historical theories use an understanding of the past to raise questions about the present. They have a political purpose.

The great events of our times promote theoretical reflection as we try to understand them, to see where they came from. Thus, for example, as Young has argued so effectively in *White Mythologies*, the critique of Enlightenment philosophies that we now call post-structuralism, developed first in the practices of anti-colonial activists who had to challenge Western philosophy if they were to create intellectual space for projecting their own independence.[4] If the West were the source of all wisdom, then, there could be nothing better for the colonies than rule by their enlightened masters. However, if the universal subject, Man, at the heart of Enlightenment philosophies could in fact be shown to be gendered, raced, and so on, then,

these claims to universalism could be shown to be partial, to be interested, and thus open to be rejected by those who were excluded or denigrated by this false universal. Parisian philosophers, such as Barthes, Derrida and Foucault,[5] then re-stated these insights, of activists such as Fanon and Cesaire,[6] as new (post-structuralist) theories.[7] Postcolonial theory, likewise, comes from real experiences. Anticolonial struggles achieved independence but, in most cases, they ended neither economic imperialism nor cultural dependence. Colonialism seemed to have consequences that lasted beyond the end of formal colonialism.[8] Thinking about these issues in India, the subaltern theorists[9] produced a set of ideas central to what we now term postcolonial theory.[10] Ireland is a useful place to take some of these theories for a walk because it experienced colonialism and postcolonialism. In the process we might learn some interesting things about Ireland and also be able to contribute to debates about the various strengths and weaknesses of these ways of looking at our world, of these theories. In doing so, though, we should remember that theory comes from experience and if we believe that Irish people shared many of the experiences that produced these theories, then, we should expect that there will be indigenous insights of similar stripe. And indeed there were. Our revisioning of the Irish condition, should also include the recovery of indigenous theory, be it the economics of James Fintan Lalor, William Thompson or James Connolly, be it the literary scholarship of James Clarence Mangan or James Joyce or William Butler Yeats, be it the critique of empire in Jonathan Swift or Edmund Burke, or be it the development of distinctive feminist theory in Constance Markievicz or Hannah Sheehy Skeffington.[11] Irish people lived through momentous events and they confronted them with an intelligent anxiety to comprehend them, just as theorists do today. Yet, with significant exceptions, Irish Studies has been characterised more by imported than by indigenous theory.[12] This is, of course, a general problem of what Robinson sees as a failure of cosmopolitan vision in modern social theory.[13] Kearney and Kiberd are among the few who take indigenous Irish theory at all as seriously as it deserves.[14]

Theory and Research

Research can be a little like taking a theory for a walk. Wearing the spectacles of a given theory we can walk around places we know well and see how differently they now appear. We might conclude that these new glasses help us to see some aspects of these places better than our earlier pair. We might also find that our new glasses obscure things that we had once been able to see more clearly. I don't want to push the analogy too far but I do want to retain two points. I want, first, to stress the impossibility of seeing clearly without some theoretical lens or other. Theory prioritises certain aspects of the places we know while relegating others in importance. And, secondly, I want to underline the importance of knowing places through which to walk theories. One valuable way of thinking about abstract ideas is to think up examples where they might apply. This requires that we know quite a lot about certain contexts so that we can translate the abstract ideas into situated details. Our knowledge about those contexts is likewise derived from experiences and readings, themselves informed by other theoretical priorities. There is no way out of this circle.[15] All knowledge is purposeful; it is never innocent of the intentions behind its acquisition. Research can never end speculation about the past (new agendas will raise new questions) but neither should theory and politics remain aloof from the revisions that come with new knowledge (both should be informed by historical scholarship).[16]

Theoretical innovation refocuses our attention. In directing our attention to particular questions, theories direct us to archives. Questions need to be operationalised in ways that mean they can be addressed with the sources available. Sources have to be interrogated creatively so that they may provide support for, or raise doubts about, statements that are empirically vulnerable. New theories, new questions often redirect our attention to materials that have been worked on by earlier scholars, suggesting novel methodologies or original ways of combining information that can be gleaned from known sources. Theoretical innovation can also suggest further places to look for sources, expanding the archive. In testing the factual statements implied by the ways particular theories make us think about the world, we might judge

that the emphases of the new theory need revision if they are to be adequate to the evidence.

The Moment of Present Danger

We live in hazardous times and now particular aspects of our past will suddenly seem especially pertinent, a certain resonance may, in Walter Benjamin's terms, mean that 'a memory [...] flashes up at a moment of danger.'[17] On one hand, we have international agreements on human rights, environmental regulation, and so on. On the other, we have the sight of the world's military superpower withdrawing from or setting aside international human rights agreements,[18] and the world's major producer of greenhouse gases refusing to risk a single domestic job in regulating their pollution of an atmosphere we must all share.[19] On one hand, then, we appear to have the lineaments of a new global citizenship and, on the other, we have the United States acting in quite a contrary manner.[20] The central merit of Agamben's work is that he provides an account of sovereignty that places such exceptional behaviour squarely within the Western development of sovereignty in general. Agamben suggests that sovereignty has ever been about such states of exception. Rather than seeing the sovereign as the agent that enforces a social contract, Agamben emphasises instead the action of the sovereign in suspending that contract. In other words, the sovereign is the agent that decides upon the exceptional use of state power. The sovereign is not bound by the rules that it enforces upon others. Sovereignty thus involves seemingly illegitimate uses of violence. Agamben further suggests that these states of exception may be visited upon persons, as when the sovereign withdraws from a certain person or category of person the protection of the law. This is the ban, rendering a person or category of person, an outlaw in their own land. Agamben proposes that in many cases, this ban takes the form of stripping persons of their political existence. They are excluded from the discursive world of citizenship, with its attendant rights and responsibilities. Denied a politically qualified existence, they are reduced instead to bare life, no longer talking they are no more than biological beings.

These exclusions may also take territorial form. A certain district may be proscribed and thus within it the normal sets of rights and responsibilities are suspended. This is the essence of martial law. Agamben stresses the significance of the writ of habeas corpus in this regard. The writ of habeas corpus expresses sovereignty in a very direct way. If required to attend in court to answer a charge, a person must surrender themselves up to the authorities. As far as the sovereign is able to secure compliance with such requests, through the police or the army, then so far, and so far only does effective sovereignty reach. In return, the sovereign promises to produce in court persons who have submitted themselves to its justice. Acting in its capacity to announce states of exception, the sovereign claims the right to suspend the writ of habeas corpus and arrest without charge or promise of trial. In this way the sovereign thus strips these people of their civil rights, their political existence, reducing them to bare biological life. In extreme cases, these states of exception involve corralling such individuals in distinct places where the rights and responsibilities attached to people at large in society no longer apply. In this regard, Agamben sees the concentration camp as an exemplar of the sovereign creation of states of exception. In this case, those excluded are retained within the sovereign territory but only by being marked out as special cases.

It is easy to see how these ideas can be applied to the way the United States, and to some extent its allies, currently exercise their sovereignty in the War on Terror. All sorts of exceptions are declared.[21] Habeas corpus is suspended. Places such as Guantánamo (Cuba), or Belmarsh (United Kingdom),[22] or Abu Ghraib (Iraq), are the stages on which are performed the reduction of persons to bare biological life, stripped of rights.[23] What is striking about these particular examples of the contemptuous and arrogant setting aside of rights is that they are not, as Agamben's discussion might lead us to expect, confined to the territory over which the United States claims sovereignty. People are being lifted in the extra-territorial spaces of Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and so on. Indeed the United States currently claims the right to extradite individuals from countries with whom it has no reciprocal agreements. Enron executives were recently removed from the

United Kingdom to face charges of financial malpractice in the United States, there is no reciprocal right to require US residents to attend for trial in the United Kingdom in cases of financial fraud.[24] Furthermore, the United States currently passes some of those it arrests to third-party states such as Egypt and Jordan where the interrogation is subject to even less media attention than on the edge of Cuba.[25]

I want to suggest that this extra-territorial use of the state of exception is at the heart of colonialism. In effect the United States is currently quite close to claiming a colonial sovereignty over much of the world. Its writ of habeas corpus, and the attendant claim to be able to suspend it, being no longer confined to its national boundaries. If I am right, then, Agamben's theory might be developed more effectively through colonial case studies than by taking Nazi Germany as the typical case of modern sovereignty. If that is the case, then, we might expect to find it illuminating to reconsider the Irish condition in the light of his ideas.

Bringing Agamben to Ireland

From the time of the Norman occupation, an English monarch claimed Ireland as its territory. The claim was always challenged and at various times, the writ of the English monarch ran no further than a Pale along the east coast.[26] In administering its Irish territories, the English both offered to Irish people, and just as frequently suspended for them, the rights and obligations of, if not citizens, then at least subjects. Max Weber has defined a state as a community in which there is a legitimate monopoly of violence in the hands of the government. In Ireland, that legitimacy was ever contested. Frustrated in their attempts to pacify their Irish territories, English monarchs and parliaments continually treated Ireland as a state of exception, a place where the liberties of free-born Englishmen were no more than hypocritical rhetoric. At various times, as the British government railed against tyranny in Europe, and fought wars to supposedly displace such tyrannies, their own conduct in their Irish backyard stood as stinging rebuke to their sincerity. At

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various times, English monarchs established parliaments in Ireland and then just as summarily ignored them or superseded their laws with ones made in London for English purposes. In certain ways, we might suggest that the state of exception is in fact the normal form of colonial rule. This had two important sets of consequences. First, the contradiction between the form of rule professed in England and that actually practised in Ireland corroded civil liberties in England too. Secondly, the constitution of the Irish as biological bare life, as beings denied effective political citizenship, continually placed violence at the heart of Irish-British relations and at the heart of Irish communal political traditions.

By examining four features of this place of bare life in Irish history, I believe I can show Irish people reflecting upon their history in ways that anticipate Agamben's ideas, as we would expect if Agamben's theory does indeed illuminate central features of the Irish condition. The four features I want to comment upon are: the plantations (land), the penal laws (law), the Famine (biological survival), and the imposition of martial law (the continuities between past and present).[27] To secure its Irish territories against their use by Spanish or French enemies as a route to Britain, successive English monarchs tried to replace as the politically, and economically, qualified ruling class in Ireland an indigenous population hostile to their rule with an English or Scots one faithful to that British rule. Thus Ireland was to be settled by a new ruling class and the existing landowners were to move away or remain to be employed as labour or exploited as short-term agricultural tenants.[28] Each of these plantations was organised territorially as successively different regions of Ireland were transferred from local to foreign ownership. Each of these plantations was also preceded by military struggle and most were likewise accompanied by further bloody resistance that had to be put down by the English army.[29]

This plantation form of colonisation was repeated in North America with its attendant displacement of the indigenous population.[30] However, in Ireland, the indigenous population remained in much greater relative numbers than in Virginia or Pennsylvania. The penal laws were addressed to this situation.

Most European countries had some sort of civil disadvantage visited upon people who did not follow the state religion. Only in Ireland did this mean that the majority of the population was so disqualified. Only in Ireland were the forms of discrimination as much economic as political. The penal laws addressed land ownership, inheritance, education and access to the professions and not just the franchise and intermarriage as was largely the case in England. The indigenous Irish were to suffer political discrimination enforced through economic discrimination.[31] When the Catholic ownership of land in Ireland was reduced to a level where it no longer threatened to form the basis for the creation of a rival ruling class, the penal laws stopped being used to their full economic effect.

The Famine, often assumed by British contemporaries to be a natural disaster, upon closer inspection was historically managed by the state. It too is a way violence was used to reduce the Irish to what Agamben calls 'bare life,' or bodies that do not speak, bodies that are not subjects or citizens of the state. Inspired by Malthusian versions of what Foucault calls biopolitics, the British treated the Famine as an opportunity to restructure the system of rural landholdings and to expose the Irish small farmers to a lesson in prudence.[32] It is clear that people within British government could contemplate the deaths of over a million people as an acceptable consequence of achieving these two goals of reforming landownership and Irish morals. It is inconceivable that if Ireland had been administered by a parliament answerable to the majority of its population, the novel experiment of abandoning established methods of administering food supplies during times of shortage could have been tried. It was to be tried later in India but the great experiment was attempted first in Ireland. This was an early-Victorian holocaust we must put alongside those late-Victorian holocausts dissected with such precision by Mike Davis.[33]

Irish people understood the plantations and the penal laws as stripping them of political liberties. They understood that they were in some ways being reduced to the life of beasts, being turned out as exiles in their own land. The Famine was very difficult to theorise about. The lessons of the Famine

seemed so apocalyptic that for some, such as John Mitchel, they produced a purely Manichean political vision.[34] The object of Irish politics would have to be the exclusion of the British. This would have to be achieved through violence since no Irish talking could force a hearing from the English. This was a likely but not an inevitable consequence of the Famine. James Fintan Lalor produced a much more sophisticated reading of the property arrangements at the heart of colonialism although ultimately the mortality of the Famine drove him to despair of civil disobedience as an effective tactic and he too embraced insurrection.[35] Resistance continued, therefore, and in administering Ireland over the nineteenth century versions of martial law were repeatedly applied to proclaimed districts and periodically rebellions were spiked through rounding up likely participants through suspending habeas corpus or by prosecuting under the novel terms of the law of treason felony. Introduced in 1847 to secure some sort of conviction against John Mitchel, treason felony made it a felony to advocate depriving the Queen of any of her territories. Seditious speech could now be treated as a crime serious enough to justify transportation or exile.

The legitimacy of British law in Ireland was thus even further compromised in the eyes of the majority of the Irish population. When reports emerged of Irish rebels going insane in prison or being subject to what we would now call cruel and degrading punishments, the notion that Irish rights could be secured by constitutional methods was further disqualified. This was particularly the case among the Irish in America. Driven, I believe, by a sense of shame about their native land and convinced that rebellion was right but very difficult and unlikely, by the 1880s Irish Americans turned to what people increasingly came to call terrorism. Thousands of Irish Americans contributed to funds whose sole purpose was to dynamite English places and terrorise the English civilian population in the hope that this would make the English feel that holding on to Ireland was not worth the effort.[36] If at the same time this resulted in the Irish in Britain suffering extreme measures, then, that would help educate them too of the need for insurrection in Ireland. We might, I think, see Irish terrorism at this time as an attempt to

use as a weapon the purely biological, bare, life that many concluded was all that English colonialism had left to them.

Manichean politics conflates history into essential identities that remain constant. Thus the only problem facing Ireland is thought to be the presence of the British. When, in the 1960s, the civil rights movement in Belfast was suppressed violently by the Protestant local police, the Protestant militia that was the B specials, and by Protestant mobs, then, this same history came back as a flash of memory with all its Manichean rhetoric, its communal rejection of the legitimacy of British justice and its historical lesson that the British cared not at all for Irish lives and would only make concessions if forced to by insurrection or terrorism.[37] It is this rejection of politics and compromise that informed Republicanism in Northern Ireland until recently. The Republican reading of British sovereignty was very much like Agamben's ideas about the place of violence in the sovereign use of the state of exception. The past was read directly into the present without using the historical record to sensitise politics to the very real discontinuities in Irish history or to alternative futures that might be imagined. This was uncritical but effective history.

Back to the Archive

My argument here has been that Agamben's theory of sovereignty has real purchase as a description of British rule in Ireland. Agamben's theory has given me a set of questions around which to organise my research. I have been seeking evidence for the suspension of laws and for the disqualification of political voices. There are many sources generated by imperial rule with its need to describe the lie of their land in its troublesome colonies. There was a veritable mania for colonial knowledge that exceeded the usefulness of the tabulated facts and was haunted by the need to provide an innocent origin for colonial rule.[38] My research rests in large part upon these records of how colonialism was policed. Yet, it is also clear that many things about resistance are at best only indirectly voiced in the colonial archive.[39] The violence of

colonialism and of the anticolonial struggle were partners in a dance to the rhythm of the uneasy attempt to secure and legitimise the use of Irish resources for broader British imperial and domestic purposes. I have been looking for Irish theorists who tried to understand this situation and I have tried to explicate their general claims. I have also found that even secret conspiratorial societies kept what were effectively business papers to manage their subscriptions, command structures and recruitment. Some of these fell into the hands of government and others remain interleaved in the archived files of correspondence of conspirators, great and small. Yet, read with the agenda of exception and bare life in mind, even very public documents such as newspapers reveal much about the ways colonial violence was perceived and anticolonial violence was justified. As I interrogate these traces I prioritise their geographical dimensions, partly because these have been almost ignored in historical studies but mainly because I find that national movements have intriguing regional dynamics that are logistically significant and raise questions about the projection and incorporation of national spaces by anticolonial movements. I have argued that there is an important scalar division of ideological reference in such movements. In some ways, the local is the embodied basis of solidarity in ways that the national struggles to become.[40]

I am left now wanting to rethink with regard to our present moment of danger the implications of my new reading of the strengths and weakness of Agamben's theory of sovereignty. I am also aware that I have prioritised certain issues, particularly violence, in my reading of the archive. It is time, now, to heed the many evidences of the hybridity of the Anglo-Irish society and culture from within which the violence yet continued to be practised. Thomas Davis spoke of 'time' as bringing many colonial families into such close communion with their neighbours that they identified with their location rather than their origin as what Oscar Bauer might term their 'community of fate.'[41] Yet alongside 'time,' Davis placed 'some citizenship' as if time conferred such rights. My reading of the Irish theorists who struggled to understand it suggests that it was precisely the experience of the Famine

that stood before many Irish people, such as Davis' admirer John Mitchel, as a stinging rebuke to the possibility of effective citizenship in an Ireland under British rule. It was, their experience of something like 'bare life' that drove them to violence and drove the British to further rounds of 'exceptions.' This is the sort of nightmarish history from which, as Joyce remarked, the Irish should try to wake up.[42]

Notes

[1] An early version of this paper was given to the Sixth Irish Geography Postgraduate Training Meeting, Glencree, January 2005. I would like to thank John Morrissey for the invitation and Mary Gilmartin, Rob Kitchin, Denis Linehan, Gerard Mills, John Morrissey and the other participants for their lively engagement with my argument. I would also like to thank Karen Till and the editors of this volume for their constructive advice.

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3

Denaturalising print, historicising text: historical geography and the history of the book

Robert Mayhew

Introduction: *Period and Place* and print

It is now some twenty five years since the last major edited collection concerning "research methods" in historical geography, Alan Baker and Mark Billinge's *Period and Place* (1982).[1] Looking back at that rather miscellaneous but useful text, one thing that strikes the eye of the next generation of historical geographers is the lack of attention to print and its perplexities. It is in the final section of *Period and Place* that "Historical Sources and Techniques" are addressed, and here we find treatment of field evidence, of cartography, of land surveys and further specific chapters on the use of private archives and sources for the study of Japan. It is only in the opening chapter of the section, J.B. Harley's "Historical Geography and its Evidence," that we find a more general reflection which treats the question of how to approach printed sources as an issue meriting methodological attention.

Harley's chapter is one of his early sallies into the use of literary and linguistic theory in the service of historical geography.[2] For Harley, the problem situation was that 'historical geography lacks a proper *philosophy* of sources'.[3] In this case, Harley draws on Roman Jakobson's model of structural linguistics to propose a general approach to documentary evidence for

historical geographers, printed matter being a subset capable of treatment within that model. Harley's model suggests we need to consider the "addresser" and "addressee" as in a system of communication and that we further need to look at the context in which a message was constructed, the message itself and the code in which that message was embodied. Led by Harley, a broad swathe of historical geographers in the 1980s and 1990s sought *philosophical approaches* which would provide methodological keys to studying documentary evidence. Perhaps the most influential suite of ideas were those in the broadly post-structural ambit, be it of a Foucauldian variety or a Derridean variety, and of course Harley tried himself to deploy both of these sets of ideas in the service of the history of cartography.[4] Inspired by these ideas, by the 1990s historical and cultural geography was concerned with approaching its evidence, printed and otherwise, as "text".[5] This meant looking at geographical objects of inquiry as structures of meaning which embodied power/knowledge or deconstructing the political assumptions they embodied. In a sense, printed prose in the guise of "text" became the guiding metaphor for the modelling and interpretation of numerous sources of evidence in historical geography.

Viewed retrospectively, one thing which is interesting about the current of ideas which Harley and others established is how insensitive it was to the *historical nature of evidence*, by which I mean the fact that evidence itself is constructed at a certain time and place and that, resultantly, both the message it embodies and the medium through which that embodiment occurs are themselves historically contingent. The reason for this insensitivity is the preoccupation which Harley signalled with *philosophy* as the key to developing a more rigorous mode of evidentiary interpretation. As the literary critic Jerome McGann has pointed out, poststructuralist criticism, especially of the deconstructive variety, tends towards an ahistorical approach to printed material, being a 'formalistically grounded operation', working by a critical method which tends to favour the indeterminacies of textual reception and to ignore the material contexts (geographical and historical) in which texts were produced and consumed.[6]

Yet at the same time as historical geographers pursued a universalising interpretative project, a broad interdisciplinary community of scholars in the humanities have been seeking to develop a more historically rigorous approach to the study of evidence in general and printed texts in particular. Restricting our focus to printed matter, this group are pioneering trends in literary criticism and book history which reject universalising claims about the nature of "textuality" and look instead at "print cultures," the ways in which different times and spaces have distinct systems of authorship and book production, possess distinct and identifiable ways of reading and criticising printed matter. The aim is to treat books not just as "data sources", but as themselves historically-embedded products whose modes of authoring, production, dissemination and reception are vital sources of insight to the historical geographer. It is the remit of this brief essay to outline the key elements of this historicisation of methodological approaches to evidence and then to give a brief example of how this approach might be deployed by historical geographers and what fruits we can hope to gain from it.[7]

Towards an historical approach to printed evidence

We can revert to Harley's Jakobsonian approach to the communicative system of a text to canvass the ways in which a historicised approach to print has been developed. From Jakobson, Harley took the idea that we need to look at "addressers" and "addressees", whom we can interpret from an historical perspective as authors and audiences. Likewise, Harley's concern with "contact", the medium of communication, and "code," the system of communication, can be taken as a concern with the historical geography of print culture (a contact) and language use (a code).

Authorship: Historians of ideas have shown that our taken-for-granted notions of the author as a"creator" owning/inventing their work are themselves a product of the Romantic period and its canonisation of creativity. Foucault most famously historicised the idea of the author, but other literary critics,

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led by Jerome McGann, have taken this further by investigating the genealogy of authorship in greater detail.[8] The upshot is that what it means to be an author changes over time (and, although no one has really written about this, over space as well). As such, when we approach a printed text from the past, we need to consider not just who wrote it - the biography of the author, their aims and ambitions - but also when and where the text was written and what that tells us of their notion of being an author and what could and could not be done/expressed by an author. For example, modern criticism of "plagiarism" relies on the Romantic conception of authorship as creativity; we must guard against transferring this criticism to the print cultures of other times and spaces wherein lifting material from other books was common practice and often had no negative connotations. Thus the history of geographical publishing, for example, shows that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century geographical textbooks habitually took over vast swathes of material from predecessors.[9] Whilst it is beholden on historians of geography to trace these transmissions and their reception, it makes no sense to castigate the practice in the light of conceptions of authorship which did not hold sway at that time.

Audience, dissemination and reception of texts: Historians and literary critics are now showing an increasing interest in how books were received and with the fact that works are understood in very different ways across time and space. There are two levels to this. First, one can look at the "implied reader", that is, the categories of reader which a book proclaims itself to be targeted at, and what this tells us about the nature of the book.[10] Second, one can trace actual readers, looking at works responding to an original text, at book reviews, at marginalia scribbled on copies of a book,[11] and at diary responses. Furthermore, one can detect seismic shifts in the practice of reading over the centuries.[12] Putting this together, one can develop complex reception histories of works such as Darwin's *Origin of Species*.[13] Going one level further, James Secord has shown for Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of Creation* (1844) how one can move from reception histories to the historical geography of reception, as the same text was interpreted very differently according to the locale and community context in which it was read.[14]

The production of print: One of the main results of historicising authorship is to realise that "the author" is not a lone figure making a book, but is enmeshed in a whole set of relations with agents, publishers, printers and booksellers to actually get their work into the public domain.[15] Editing and translating can add yet further intermediaries in the process.[16] Each of these relations complicates the connection of a work with its author and helps to determine the "meaning(s)" of a text. Again, the ways in which a print culture operates vary in time and space, such that we need to be aware of the historical geographies of the production of print if we are to understand what Harley termed the "contact" established between author and audience. Reverting to early-modern geographical textbooks, for example, the complex transmissions and recycling of old material in new texts was driven in good part by a drive to minimise costs and maximise the speed of textual production on the part of publishers and booksellers. It is only when we place geographical texts in their publishing contexts that many of the dynamics of the print process – what St Clair has termed the "political economy of reading" - can be fully understood.[17]

The historical geography of communication: The historicisation of print also demands that we see the very codes of communication we use as displaying an historical geography. The meaning of words as the building blocks of our communication, for example, change over time and space. Language is historically and geographically contingent in its meaning and we need to distinguish our understanding of terms from those they had in past times and spaces.[18] For example, early-modern European geography had precise definitions for terms such as "continent" and "island," and these drove most late Renaissance scholars to define the newly-discovered American landmass as an "island." It would be a mistake for modern readers to see this as belittling America or seeing it as less important than a continent; it simply reflected the linguistic definitions geographers deployed in that era.[19] On a smaller scale, scholars have also pointed out that the "look" of the printed page, the physical interaction of ink and blank space help to determine the meaning and reception of a text and that the accepted norms for the appearance of the printed page vary over time and space.[20] This has led to a concern with the meaning of those parts of a book we normally ignore, what

Genette calls the "paratexts," those parts of a printed book which are not the main body of a text, but which help to create its overall meaning – the acknowledgements page, the titlepage, footnotes, introductions and so forth.[21] We can certainly say that in different times and spaces, geography books have adopted very different formatting conventions and deployed very different paratextual devices to create their systems of meaning. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century geography books, for example, predominantly used either an alphabetical system of organisation or described the world sequentially by continent, but in both cases they developed a textual format suggesting that they were useful digests of knowledge, clear paragraphing being supported by finding aids such as indices and elaborate tables of contents. The format of these books, then, suggested they were pedagogic texts with a reference function, something which was swept away by nineteenth century attempts to reformulate geography.[22]

An example: printing Varenius's *Geographia Generalis*

The work I want to look at in the light of this drive to historicise our understanding of the printed word as a form of evidence is Bernhard Varenius's *Geographia Generalis*, first published in Latin in Amsterdam in 1650. This book has been seen as a landmark in the history of geographical thought: 'the intellectual divide separating ancient and medieval geography from modern geography is generally taken to be the publication of the *Geographia Generalis* by Bernhard Varenius'.[23] It has also been claimed to have been widely read in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in both Europe and North America, being aggrandized as 'the standard text for geography in universities for more than a century'.[24] In the light of these big claims about the centrality of Varenius to our disciplinary history, what does attending to the *Geographia Generalis* as a document from a specific print culture in time and space add to our understanding? I want to consider this question with respect to the 1765 English edition of the *Geographia Generalis*.

If we start by attending to an often-neglected paratext, the titlepage, we are immediately given pause for thought about the authorship of the work [See Figure 1]. Here we are told the text was "Originally Written in Latin" by Varenius, was "improved and illustrated" by Isaac Newton and James Jurin, was translated into English by Dugdale and finally revised and corrected by Peter Shaw. In short, far from being simply a work by Varenius it is also edited by at least three people (Newton, Jurin and Shaw) and further amended by its translation from Latin to English by Dugdale (and possibly Shaw as well, the phrasing being ambiguous). Authorship is rendered still more heterogeneous by that fact that this edition also incorporated a set of popular "geographical paradoxes" taken directly from the second edition of Patrick Gordon's immensely popular geographical textbook, *Geography Anatomiz'd* (1699).[25] In fact, and as the "Translator's Preface" outlines, there has been a complex interleaving of what Varenius actually wrote in 1650 (this itself, of course, being the result of a complex set of transactions with publishers and others) with later additions and adjustments. True to this, the result is a very complex space of the printed page in this edition of Varenius, wherein any given page contains not only Varenius's words (albeit translated) but also at least two sets of editorial interventions in the form of bracketed additions in the text and long footnotes, most of which correct Varenius in the light of subsequent geographical knowledge [See Figure 2]. Whilst the details are beyond my remit here, we can at least say that it is far too simple to identify Varenius as the "author" of the 1765 *Geographia Generalis* without acknowledging the other voices of editors and translators. We can also say that the polyvocality of the text is reflected in the spatial format of the page and its deployment of paratextual devices.

Whilst the book in and of itself cannot tell us about its audience, it does give some guidance as to its "implied readership" in the "Translator's Preface". Here, we are told that the translation has been in as plain a language as possible, 'to make the Author *understood*, even by Persons of ordinary capacities' and that the aim was to produce 'an useful Edition of the Work, rather than one that was Elegant and Polite'.[26] Both of these comments suggest that the translation is targeted at those seeking useful knowledge

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By Mr. D U G D A L E.

The Whole Revifed and Correted by *P E T E R S H A W,* M. D.

𝕿𝖍𝖊 𝖋𝖔𝖚𝖗𝖙𝖍 𝕰𝖉𝖎𝖙𝖎𝖔𝖓, 𝖜𝖎𝖙𝖍 𝖑𝖆𝖗𝖌𝖊 𝖆𝖉𝖉𝖎𝖙𝖎𝖔𝖓𝖘.

In TWO VOLUMES.

L O N D O N,

Printed for L. HAWES, W. CLARKE, and R. COLLINS, at the *Red-Lion,* in *Pater-Nofter-Row.*

M. DCC.LXV.

Figure 1: **The multiplicity of authorship**: Bernhard Varenius, *Complete System of General Geography* (1765), Titlepage. Note the multiple authorship, layers of translation and editing, and cartel of publishers for this text. Obviously, to label this as "by" Varenius is a shorthand which needs unpacking!

226   *The Abſolute Part*   SECT. IV.

tuns are taught to draw to the Shore with Nets of Wire, when certain Winds blow.

THE Ocean casts up Ambergris only in the *Torrid Zone*, (if we may believe some Authors) *viz.* at the Shore of *Braſil* (where a *Dutch* Soldier once found a Piece weighing five hundred Pound, and presented it to Count *Maurice* of *Naſſau*); also at *Madagaſcar*, at the Cape of *Good-Hope*, at the Island of *Maurice* (by the *Portugueſe* called *de Cirne*), at *Sumatra*, and other *Indian* Islands. *Garcias* relates, that there was a Piece one time found of two thousand Pound Weight, and that some Islands are all of Ambergris; but he does not tell us where they are situated (n).

THE *Ethiopic* Ocean, at *Guinea*, *Congo*, and *Angola*, has this peculiar Property; that Shells as green as Grass stick to the Sides and Keels of Ships; while they remain or sail there, which retard their Course and eat out the Timber.

UPON the Coast of *Britagne* in *France*, wild Fowls are generated on the Sides and Keels of Ships, being at first unshapely, but afterwards are formed by degrees, and having their Bills fastned into the Wood, they begin to move, and at last pull themselves off, and swim in the Sea like Ducks. [Theſe we call *Barnacles*.]

(n) Ambergris is found in several other Places; as at Cape Comoria, there was taken up a Piece of three hundred Weight, and another weighing fifteen hundred Pound; as *dcribes-Fetri* in *Jamaica* there was found a Piece one hundred and fifty Pound Weight; and in several Places without the *Torrid Zone*, as upon the Coast of *New England*, on the western Coast of *Ireland*, &c.

Some will have it to be the Wax or Honey of some living Creatures; others say it issues out of the Root of a Tree, that grows in the Sea, like Gum; others that it is a Bitumen, and comes from the Entrails of the Earth, which is the most likely Opinion. See *Philoſ. Tranſ.* No 92. Page 611. No 232. Page 711. and No 263. Page 573.

THE

CHAP. 13.   *of Univerſal Geography.*   227

THE Excrement of the Ocean, which we call Froth, is observed to float in several Places, and more in some than in others.

THERE are found Water Lentils in several Parts of the Ocean, as between *England* and *France*, upon the Coast of the South Continent, and elsewhere.

ON the Coast of *Malabar* and *Cambaya* there are found Serpents upon the Surface of the Water; from whence Sailors guess at their approach to these Countries.

ABOUT four Leagues from *New-Spain*, several Roots, Reeds, and Leaves, like those of the Fig-Tree, float to and again, upon the Water, which they commonly eat; and their Taste is something like Cabbage.

WE read in the first Voyage of the *Dutch* to the Streights of *Magellan*, that on the twelfth of *January* 1599, the Water of the Ocean, not far from the Mouth of the *Silver River*, (*Rio de Plata*) appeared of a red and bloody Colour; but when they had drawn up a Bucket, and observed it more narrowly, they found in it an innumerable Multitude of little Worms of a red Colour, which, being taken into their Hands, leaped up and down like Fleas. Hence the Seamen call them Sea-Fleas *, and believe that they are vomited by Whales, at a certain Time of the Year. Others think they proceed from an innumerable Company of

* Dr *Derham* in his *Phyſ. Theol.* lib. iv. c. 11, Note (n) ... faith, the Insects that for the most part discolour the Waters, are the small Insects of the Shrimp-Kind, called, by *Swammerdam*, *Pulex aquaticus arborescens*. Which are sometimes so numerous in the Summer, ... a horrible Ramour; and when

Q 2

Figure 2: The print space of polyvocality: Bernhard Varenius, *Complete System of General Geography* (1765), pp.226-7. Dugdale's translation of Varenius here competes for space on the page with bracketed additions (as in the last line of the main text on page 226) and with two sets of footnotes, some keyed by an initial in the text (see page 226), others by an asterisk (see page 227), suggesting at least two rounds of annotation (perhaps by different individuals as set out on the title page) or a set of annotations which arrived late with the printer and were hence keyed by asterisks as later pages had already been printed with the sequential alphabetical keying.

but without any elaborate educational attainments. Indeed, the very nature of a translation into the vernacular from Latin tended to suggest such an audience in this era in European print culture.[27] The polyvocality of the text is reaffirmed to the extent that the implied readership for the English edition cuts against what Varenius penned about the learned nature of the intended audience for the original Latin edition of his book, as translated a few pages later: 'neither *Divines, Physicians, Lawyers, Historians,* nor other *Men* of *Letters,* can well proceed in their Studies ... unless they have some Knowledge of *Geography'*.[28] Clearly, the multiple voices embodied in the text led to conflicting messages about the implied readership for the book itself.

Reverting to the title page, we see that a cohort published the book – Hawes, Clarke and Collins – yet the flyleaf at the end of the book advertises works printed for a wholly different publisher, Stephen Austen. Yet Austen had died in 1750, so could not have been advertising some fifteen years later. He was, however, the publisher of the earlier (first through third) editions of this translation. What seems to have happened in line with standard practice in the English book trade at the time, is that Austen's spare stock and intellectual property rights in the title were sold by his widow after his death, Varenius being sold to Hawes *et al.* In short, the 1765 edition is not a real edition at all, but an attempt to sell off unwanted stock, packaged spuriously as a "new" edition in the hope of drumming up trade. This is confirmed by the text itself which refers to the time of its writing as 1734.[29]

Whilst there is much more that could be said about the printing and print history of the English translations of the *Geographia Generalis,*[30] even these three brief points are significant because they act to inflect the received picture of the role of the text in the history of geographical thought in several ways. First, there is a decoupling of "Varenius" as an author from the *Geographia Generalis* as a text, the later going through multiple incarnations with different impacts on the history of geographical thought. If the 1650 Latin edition of the *Geographia Generalis* embodied multiple sets of intentions and negotiations, that observation applies *a fortiori* to the 1765 English edition. Print culture and its dynamics, then, demand that we adopt a more

sophisticated concept of an author and their role in the development of geographical ideas. In many ways this is embodied in the very print space of the English editions of the *Geographia Generalis*, designed as they were to allow multiple voices to coexist. Second, if the multiple interventions of editing, translating and publishing could change the message of a book, they could also change the implied and actual readership for that book. General claims about the centrality of the *Geographia Generalis* to the geographical education of 17th and 18th century Europe ignore that different versions would target very different audiences and be read in different ways and for different reasons, according to where they were read and when that reading occurred in the period between 1650 and 1765. Third, the print history of the 1765 *Geographia Generalis* cuts against simplistic notions that it was the standard geographical textbook of its age. Simply put, the spurious edition of 1765 was an attempt to sell off unwanted stock, something which hardly fits with the image of the *Geographia Generalis* as a much-needed textbook that has been the received wisdom amongst historians of geographical thought. In the mid-eighteenth century, other texts of geographical instruction, such as Patrick Gordon's *Geography Anatomiz'd* and William Guthrie's *New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar*, went through more editions with larger print runs. Clearly, our image of eighteenth-century geographical instruction needs to be revisited in the light of the facts of print history.

Conclusion: historicising text, denaturalising print

The approach which Brian Harley sketched to tackling printed evidence some twenty five years ago has proved massively fruitful for historical geographers. Harley's call for an approach to historical data sources as communicative structures to be tackled in the light of linguistic philosophy clearly struck a chord with a generation of historical geographers. We might say that what Harley's initial structuralism, his later poststructuralism and the several lines of Foucauldian analysis in historical geography had in common was a concern to denaturalise communication, to dissect the communicative process rather than assuming we can merely focus on meaning as the

interesting thing for which the communicative process acted as a transparent window.

This short essay and the work on which it draws is intended to take this process further by suggesting that modes of communication are historically and geographically grounded too. This in turn suggests that we cannot look for a general or universal method, be that structuralist or poststructuralist, by which to approach the evidence which various communicative media offer us as historical geographers. On the contrary, there is an historical geography to each of these media such that we need to see our evidence as itself an historical product rather than just the entry point to the reconstruction of past cultures. Furthermore, it is suggested that this is not a dusty antiquarianism, or a pedantic concern with details, rather that paying attention to minutiae can lead to important revisionist gains in our understanding of historical processes and patterns. Where Harley (quite rightly) pitched his work against any simplistic division between evidence and theory, an historicised approach to communication further suggests the need to dissolve the binary of evidence and narrative; to historicise and denaturalise our conception of evidence is, *ipso facto*, to rework and inflect our narrative certainties.

Notes

[1] A. Baker and M. Billinge (eds) *Period and place: research methods in historical geography* (Cambridge, 1982).
[2] For Harley's intellectual trajectory, see M. Edney, The origins and development of J.B. Harley's cartographic theories *Cartographica* Monograph **54**, 2005.
[3] J.B. Harley, Historical geography and its evidence: reflections on modelling sources, in A. Baker and M. Billinge (Eds) *Period and place: research methods in historical geography* (Cambridge, 1982) 261-73, 263. My emphasis.
[4] These essays are now usefully collected in B. Harley, *The new nature of maps: essays in the history of cartography* (Baltimore, 2001).
[5] See especially J. Duncan, *The city as text: the politics of landscape interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1990).
[6] J. J McGann, *The textual condition* (Princeton, 1991) p. 32.

[7] More detail can be found in R. Mayhew, Materialist hermeneutics, textuality and the history of geography: print spaces and disciplinary revolutions, c.1500-1900, forthcoming in *Journal of Historical Geography*. For other recent studies interweaving the materiality of print with revisionist approaches to the history of geography, see M. Ogborn, Geographia's pen: writing, geography and the arts of commerce, c.1660-1760 *Journal of Historical Geography* **30** (2004) 294-315; C.W.J Withers, Writing in geography's history: Caledonia, networks of correspondence and geographical knowledge in the late Enlightenment *Scottish Geographical Journal*, **120** (2004) 33-45; M. Brückner, *The geographic revolution in early America: maps, literacy and national identity* (Chapel Hill, 2006); C. Johnson, Renaissance German cosmographers and the naming of America *Past and Present* **191** (2006) 3-43.

[8] M. Foucault, What is an Author?, reprinted in M. Foucault, *Essential works: volume 2: aesthetics* (Harmondsworth, 1998) 205-222; McGann, *Textual Condition*; and J. J McGann, *A critique of modern textual criticism* (Charlottesville, 1992).

[9] For this practice, see R. Mayhew, The character of English geography, c.1660-1800: a textual approach *Journal of Historical Geography* **24** (1998) 385-412.

[10] See W. Iser, *The implied reader: patterns of communication from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, 1978).

[11] See H.J Jackson, *Marginalia: readers writing in books* (New Haven, 2001).

[12] See G. Cavallo and R. Chartier, (Eds) *A history of reading in the West* (Oxford 1999).

[13] R. Numbers and J. Stenhouse, (Eds) *Disseminating Darwinism: the role of place, race, religion and gender* (Cambridge 2000).

[14] J. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: the extraordinary publication, reception and secret authorship of* Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (Chicago, 2000).

[15] See especially in this regard D. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the sociology of texts*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1999); and D. McKenzie, *Making meaning: "Printers of the Mind" and other essays* (Amherst, 2002). For the best example of what this means for the production of knowledge, see A. Johns, *The nature of the book: print and knowledge in the making* (Chicago, 1998).

[16] On these topics, see S. L. Montgomery, *Science in translation: movements of knowledge through cultures and time* (Chicago, 2000); and P. France and S. Gillespie, (Gen. Eds.) *The Oxford history of literary translation in English* (Oxford, 2005-).

[17] W. St Clair, *The reading nation in the Romantic period* (Cambridge, 2004).

[18] See in particular Q. Skinner, Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas, in J. Tully, (Ed) *Meaning and context: Quentin Skinner and his critics* (Cambridge, 1988) 29-67. More generally, see S. Roger Fischer's trilogy, *A history of language* (London, 1999); *A history of writing* (London, 2001); *A history of reading* (London, 2003).

[19] See Johnson, German Cosmographers, 21-22. For later linguistic definitions of geography, see Mayhew, Character of English geography, 389-93.

[20] See McKenzie, Printers of the mind; and J. Bray *et al*, (Eds) *Mar(k)ing the text: the presentation of meaning on the literary page* (Ashgate, 2000).

[21] See G. Genette, *Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation* (Cambridge, 1997) for this in general. More specific studies of individual paratexts include: A. Grafton, *The footnote: a curious history* (London, 1997); and F. Waquet, Acknowledgements: instructions for use *Modern Intellectual History* **2** (2005) 361-85.

[22] See Mayhew, Materialist hermeneutics, for more details.

[23] F. Lukermann, The *Praecognita* of Varenius: seven ways of knowing, in A. Buttimer, S. Brunn and U. Wardenga (Eds) *Text and image: social constructions of regional knowledges* (Leipzig, 1999) 7-27, 7.

[24] P. James, On the origin and persistence of error in geography *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **57** (1967) 1-24, 21.

[25] B. Varenius, *A complete system of general geography* (London, 1765) 779ff.

[26] *Ibid*, viii.

[27] On this topic, see P. Burke, *Languages and communities in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2004) chapters 2 and 3.

[28] *Ibid*, 10.

[29] *Ibid*, 839.

[30] I have discussed these matters at greater length elsewhere: R. Mayhew, Printing posterity: editing Varenius and the construction of geography's history, typescript intended for publication in C.W.J. Withers and M. Ogborn, (Eds) *Geographies of the book*.

4

Practical remembrance: material and method in a recycled archive

Caitlin DeSilvey

Research as reanimation

Historical geographers eager to recuperate stories, sensations, and sensibilities un- or under-represented in the archive have begun to look elsewhere for their sources. In an emerging body of work, researchers work with residual materials in order to recover or re-animate dormant memories. The 'memory' recovered in these experiments is a curious element. It is not the stuff of the researcher's personal memory, nor is it the distillate of cultural memory that coalesces around memorial objects such as monuments and museum collections.[1] The work charts out a territory somewhere in between these personal and cultural registers, staging an intimate, though alien, encounter—in that the recovered experience is effectively borrowed (from reindeer herders, or factory workers, or souvenir collectors).[2] Material remnants and re-enacted gestures function as vectors for the transmission of memory after the original rememberers have passed on. Some of my own experience with such performative methodologies has led me to think carefully about what this kind of work does, with both its objects and its subjects.

Homestead: revitalisation

For the past several years I've been carrying out research on a semi-derelict homestead in Western Montana. The farm, settled with a homestead claim in 1889, lies a few miles north of the small city of Missoula, tucked into the bare foothills of the Rocky Mountains. For most of the twentieth century, the Randolph family practiced subsistence farming on the site. The youngest son in the family died in 1995, leaving behind a complex of ramshackle sheds and dwellings crammed with the debris of decades. The City of Missoula acquired the homestead in 1996, as part of a purchase of open space land. I came along in 1997 and began to work with the homestead's residual material culture, first as a volunteer curator and later as a doctoral student in cultural geography.[3]

Over the course of my research the homestead was gradually drawn back into active production, under the auspices of a local community group that had taken on management of the site for the city. Sheep grazed in the old orchard, vegetables grew in the garden, chickens lived in the coop and derelict structures were re-patched and repaired. The revitalisation of the place picked up on the spirit of scavenger re-use already evident in the site's construction. The original residents built their dwellings and outbuildings out of bits and pieces they gleaned from railroad lots and city dump piles: scrap lumber, fruit crates, railroad sleepers. They stockpiled heaps of material for future use, each scrap carrying the story of its former function. The eave of the hay barn shows the ghost lettering of stencil that once marked the side of a railroad boxcar. A metal sign advertises an obsolete orange cola while it plugs a gap in a fenceline. In one of the more striking examples of this *bricolage* practice, relic pieces of car chassis and bumper form a boundary fence on top of a ridgeline. The cast-offs generated by a system of planned obsolescence are immortalized in a Montana henge, a phenomenon that a friend once dubbed 'fence post-Fordism' [See Figure 1]. In our re-habitation

Figure 1: The 'post-Fordist' fence marking the edge of the Randolph property.

of the homestead, we enlisted the Randolphs' stockpiled materials for new forms and functions. Old tools were dusted off and put back to work. Scrap metal patched roofs and covered a shade shelter for the sheep. Jars of nuts and bolts moved from the dark of abandoned shelves into active service. Children rummaged around in sheds to find materials for the construction of a scarecrow. A pirate woman in a moth-eaten wool coat, with hose-washer earrings and wire-coil hair, now raises her rubber-glove hands to frighten off hungry crows. Some of our appropriation was self-conscious, in that there was a deliberate decision to mimic the Randolphs' 'make-do' ingenuity. But much of it was not, or not explicitly so. Things were reused because they were there, and needed.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I became curious about the way the re-habitation of the place seemed to generate a haptic echo of former practices. Physical labour brought to the surface bodily rhythms and relations that had been materialised in the landscape over decades of use—fixing, digging, carrying, opening, pumping, hammering, lifting.[4] The practical memory generated through these actions often went unarticulated and unremarked on. Very rarely were the homestead's objects framed as artefacts and asked to speak to their pasts abstractly. They came into their own as people made use of them, and drew them into an extended process of doing and making in place.[5]

Whose memory?

In our work at the homestead, the past emerged into the present not through deliberate recollection or representation, but through specific, embodied actions—and acts of material reuse, in particular.[6] After the event, however, when I tried to articulate what was going on, I realised that I was unsure about how to describe the effect we generated through this kind of engagement. A short narration of two different moments might help explain this uncertainty.

The homestead's milk house, which the Randolphs constructed out of discarded boxcar panels and scrap lumber, is a simple shed-roofed structure. It is the only building on the property with a poured concrete foundation—a feature required for compliance with 1920s dairy processing sanitation codes. When I started to work at the homestead the little building was crammed with feed sacks and twine. Once I'd cleared out the contents I decided to wash the concrete floor. Bent over on my knees on the gritty, cold surface, I scrubbed away at stubborn stains and discoloured patches with a brush I'd found tossed in a corner. The work was grimy, unpleasant, and tedious. But as I reached for my bucket of water to sluice the dirt down the open drain, I felt an odd sensation—another body, kneeling on this floor, scouring away. The feeling faded quickly. It was a fleeting sensation of corporeal memory,

ingrained in the moment of its reception. I had been, in a sense, 'possessed' by the ghost of Emma Randolph, who must have kneeled to the same chore year after year.[7] A moment of mimetic labour opened up a channel of communication that tracked along former networks of relation and resonance.

The other examples hinges on a gate. A few summers ago, a group of teenage volunteers built two gates for the homestead's garden enclosure. They constructed one simple gate of wood slats and timbers. The second gate began with a screen door, and a few mismatched lengths of lumber. The carpenters fastened the door onto a crude panel with ornate antique hinges. In a deliberate emulation of the homestead's scavenger aesthetic, the workers covered the panel with found materials—license plates and ceiling tin, draped chains and wheel rims. The finished project hangs at the south end of the garden plot, fastened to the upright posts with a massive iron spike. The miscellaneous pieces realized a renewed purpose in a structure that extended a pattern of use and reuse long established in the homestead's landscape, and the gate became a favourite feature for homestead visitors.

Both of these rather different instances engage in the reanimation of matter and the activation of memory in place. But when I came to write about these experiences as a kind of *recovery* of past sensation, or experience, I realised that I wasn't convinced that I could make this claim cleanly. If we were recovering memory, whose memories were they? A couple of things puzzled me about how I should understood my role—and the role of the other contemporary doers—in the work of making these memories. One element of this uncertainty can be described as a suspicion that I was veering towards a dangerous folk-fetishism. In the scrubbing moment, I was reluctant to identify the sensation I felt as a 'memory' because this seemed to engage in a kind of methodological ventriloquism that denied the absence at the heart of the relation between Emma Randolph and myself. There was a hint of stolen goods in my eagerness to align my experience with Emma's. Another aspect of

my uncertainty, highlighted by the gate, concerned the implied politics in our acts of material remembrance. On the gate construction and other similar projects there was often a temptation to overstate the historical resonance of our contemporary re-use. We wanted to believe that the Randolphs' recycling practice stemmed out of a muted politics of resistance to the rampant consumption of the 20th century, and tended to forget that their survival strategies arose to confront real conditions of scarcity and need. This (potential) distortion of their motives allowed us to imagine our contemporary practice as the re-activation of a dormant 'counter-memory', a sympathetic denial of consumer culture.[8]

Resolution in place

Both of my misgivings centre on questions of intention and invention. I began to think that one of the reasons I was stuck was because I was using the wrong language to describe what we were doing with memory in this place. 'Recovery', seemed to place our role of as contemporary salvagers in an oddly passive mode, delivering the 'memory' through a simple act of transference. What was actually going on was much more complicated. And the metaphor that would frame the making of memory and meaning at this site in a more dynamic and participatory mode was right there around us.

Our physical and imaginative labour picked up the remnants of place and made use of them in very particular ways. What resulted from this work was not a recovered memory, necessarily, but a patchwork invention that drew partly on the very real presence of the materials we encountered and equally on what we brought to the event. Our labour accomplished a recombination—of new bodies and old things—rather than a recuperation. I began to think about the process as kind of *recycling* of memory.[9] The place itself offered a material metaphor for the creative cultural remembrance we

performed—patching together a bit of this, and a bit of that, to make a useful history.[10] The reclamation of memory's materials transformed their character and currency and wove them into a shared composite best understood as belonging both to the past and the present [See Figure 2].
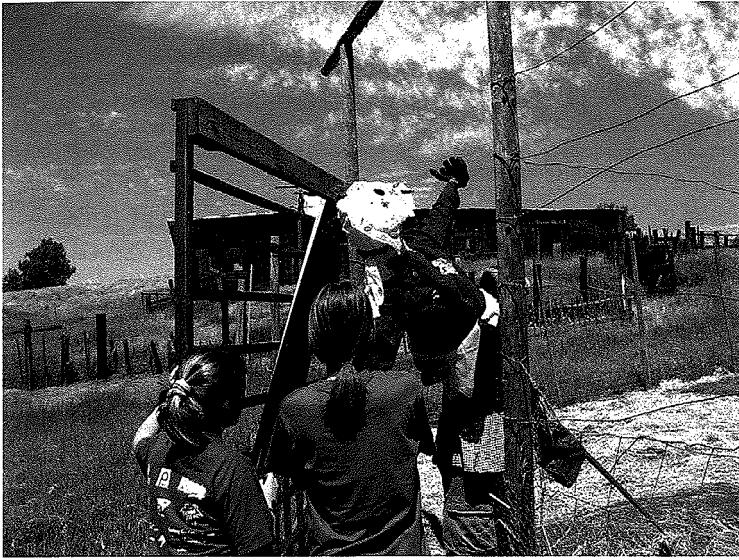
Figure 2: Children install their rag-bag scarecrow in the homestead's garden.

This reframing allowed me to understand the elements of projected politics and imagined empathy as integral to the project of remembrance, rather than troubling excesses that distracted from the central project. Our acts of imitation, empathy, and appropriation provided the conditions for the creation of a new understanding of material and place. As Michael Taussig has argued, the awkward artifice of imitation is a tool that allows us to make contact with other worlds and temporalities. Taussig describes this mimetic relation as a yielding, 'a mirroring of the knower in the unknown, of thought in its object'.[11] Haptic memories saturate working landscapes: 'a little bit of you' is left behind in each nail, each fencepost, and each roof shingle.[12] When contemporary

subjects reclaim these objects and materials for their own project of self-making, matter (a board, a pitchfork, a path) acts as a hinge that allows passage over the threshold, and contact with an otherwise inaccessible past.[13] Hayden Lorimer's observations about the field as an 'active archive', where people and place combine and recombine to generate understandings of the past, are relevant in this context, as is the work of archaeologists Christopher Tilley and Barbara Bender on Bodmin Moor.[14]

At the homestead, our acts of *bricolage* produced new memories; the living history of the place resonated with former practices and future politics. I don't intend to suggest through these observations that we should stop trying to animate dormant sensations through contact with certain materials. We just need to careful about assuming that materiality offers us privileged access to a pre-discursive past. We also may need to develop new modes of description and interpretation. If the 'conservation ethic'[15] links the preservation of cultural memory with the continued durability of material forms, a recycling mode of remembrance focuses on the uses and reuses of the material world, the way things are caught up in practices of active recollection that might not respect their continued stability.[16] The memory we salvage, made up of remnant materials and real-time overlays of meaning and motive, is always a fragile and mismatched assemblage. This awareness came into sharp relief at the homestead, as the character of the place reoriented my theoretical bearings and proposed a subtly altered direction for research and reflection.

Notes

[1] B. Anderson, Recorded music and practices of remembering *Social and Cultural Geography* **5** (2004) 3-20; N. Johnson, Framing the past: time, space, and the politics of heritage tourism in Ireland *Political Geography* **18** (2004) 187-207; O. Jones, An ecology of emotion, memory, self and landscape, in J. Davidson, L. Bondi and M. Smith (Eds), *Emotional Geographies* (Aldershot, 1999) 205-218; C.W.J. Withers, Place, memory, monument: memorializing the past in contemporary Highland Scotland, *Ecumene* **3** (1996) 325-344.

[2] D. DeLyser, Recovering social memories from the past: the 1884 novel *Ramona* and tourist practices in turn-of-the-century southern California *Social and Cultural Geography* **5** (2004) 483-496; T. Edensor, The ghosts of industrial ruins: ordering and disordering memory in excessive space, *Society and Space* **23** (2005) 829-849; H. Lorimer, Herding memories of humans and animals, *Society and Space* **24** (2006) 497-518.

[3] C. DeSilvey, Observed decay: telling stories with mutable things *Journal of Material Culture* **11** (2006) 317-337; Art and archive: memory-work on a Montana homestead, *Journal of Historical Geography,* in press.

[4] M. E. O'Neill, Corporeal experience: a haptic way of knowing *Journal of Architectural Education* **55** (2001) 3-12.

[5] W. Benjamin, *The arcades project* (Cambridge 1999).

[6] M. Crang, Qualitative methods: touchy, feely, look-see? *Progress in Human Geography* **27** (2003) 494-504.

[7] See Edensor, Ghosts of industrial ruins, for extended reflection on possession and place.

[8] For a similar ascription of political significance to re-animated historic practices, see D. Crouch & G. Parker, "Digging up" utopia? Space, practice, and land use heritage *Geoforum* **34** (2003) 395-408

[9] B. Neville and J. Villeneuve, *Waste-site stories: the recycling of memory* (Albany, 2002). Theories of "invented memory" and "post-memory" also offer critical resources for understanding cultural remembrance as a deeply composite process.

[10] On 'useful histories" see, W. I. Susman, *Culture as history: the transformation of American society in the twentieth century* (New York, 1984).

[11] M. Taussig, *Mimesis and alterity* (London, 1993).

[12] O'Neill, "Corporeal experience".

[13] Pinder, D. Ghostly footsteps: voices, memories, and walks in the city *Ecumene* **8** (2000) 1-19.

[14] H. Lorimer, The geographical field course as active archive *Cultural Geographies* **10** (2003) 278-308; C. Tilley, S. Hamilton and B. Bender, Art and the re-presentation of the past *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* **6** (2000) 35-62.

[15] M. Shanks, D. Platt, D., and W. Rathje, The perfume of garbage: modernity and the archaeological. *Modernism/Modernity* **11** (2004) 61-83.

[16] R. Colloredo-Mansfeld, Matter unbound *Journal of Material Culture* **8** (2004) 245-254; S. Kuchler, The place of memory, in A. Forty, S. Kuchler, (Eds) *The art of forgetting* (Oxford, 1999) 53-72.

5

Breakfasting with William Morris Davis: everyday episodes in the history of geography

Innes Keighren

Introduction: geography and biography

Whilst on a lecture tour in California, the American geomorphologist William Morris Davis (1850–1934) dispatched to his children an irreverent missive detailing, among other salient facts, his preferred breakfast: "two shredded wheat biscuits and a half pint of milk and salt. No sugar, thank you; too obesifying".[1] This seemingly unimportant detail, a mundane fragment of Davis's everyday life, forms part of the archives of the Association of American Geographers—at once an institutional repository and a record of its members' personal experience. The varied and intimate nature of such archives, comprising "correspondence, diaries…theatre stubs and utility bills", allows and requires the historian of geography to engage with the commonplace detail of past geographers' lives.[2] There seems little opportunity in the disciplinary historiography to reflect, however, on such minutia, or to assess their value beyond the purely anecdotal.

This paper is concerned with such unconsidered trifles—the "clutter of geographer's ordinary lives"—and the ways in which these inform scholarly biography.[3] In what follows I examine the role of biography in the disciplinary history of geography and consider the extent to which biographical writing has privileged certain modes of representation,

particularly the "chronological scheduling of great names, key works, and important dates".[4] The individual and intimate details of lives lived are not, as the metaphor of archival digging might suggest, something from which more significant material is to be excavated. Rather, the personal and everyday detail with which archival work invariably deals is an important record of the professional practice of geography.

In much the same way that particular aspects of the archival record have been privileged, certain modes of biographical representation have characterized historical writing in geography. Traditional histories of the discipline have emphasized "cumulative progress, great-name history and the cataloguing of people and publications".[5] This tendency to recount the discipline through the professional achievements of its distinguished practitioners has been subject to criticism, however, for its paternalistic biographical orientation, hagiographic assessments, and Anglo-American focus. Biographical scholarship in geography, despite these pejorative associations, has made an important contribution to the discipline's attempt to know itself: to understand its practice by attending to the "lifepaths" of its practitioners.[6]

Biographical excursions into the discipline's history are followed often by doubt as to their scholarly value. As a historical method, biography is seen to be "too restrictive and redolent of the outmoded emphasis on great men".[7] Attending to the lives of past geographers risks, it is feared, "feeding back into the progressivist grand narratives of old"—subverting the contextually-nuanced, socially- and spatially-attuned assessments which replaced them.[8] In a historiographical climate which tends to be "nonindividualistic and a-biographical", a scholarly focus on the work of individual geographers—as a proxy for broader trends within the development of the discipline—can seem anachronistic by comparison.[9] Indeed, as Withers notes, "Recounting distinguished lives…is not the same thing at all as discerning the historical and present contours of geography as a discipline".[10] Underlying these general concerns as to the validity of biography is a tension between attending to a subject's geographical work and his or her personal life—what

has been described as "the dual challenge of telling history and telling lives".[11] The former is seen as somehow more worth of academic scrutiny—the latter merely "biographical colour".[12]

Whilst much biographical work continues to attend to the discipline's 'founding fathers'—a consequence, Ron Johnson asserts, of the fact that geography's "intellectual and institutional trajectories during much of the twentieth century were...steered by a small number of pioneers"—recent interventions have attempted to consider the contribution of lesser-known or previously-overlooked geographers, and to extend the epistemic focus of biography into the non-human realm.[13] The intimate connections between the practitioners of geography and its intellectual development have been described in a number of biographical projects. These include the two-volume *Leaders in American Geography* (1992, 2000); the *Biographical Dictionary of Geography* (1993); the recently-reissued *Dictionary of National Biography* (2004)— which details the intellectual contribution of a number of British geographers—and the venerable *Geographers: Biobibliographical Studies* series, which comprises essay-length assessments of almost four hundred geographers, from various nations and historical periods.[14]

For a number of Anglo-American geographers the most extensive biographical scrutiny to which they are subject is, however, an obituary in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* or *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*.[15] Untrammelled by the requirements of scholarly biography, these obituaries, memorials, and eulogies are often intimate, personal, and humorous—attending to the "warp and woof of a life".[16] The obituarist and biographer occupy a position of power, and are able to "reorder and reconstruct the subject's life".[17] Responsible for the written record, they enjoy a freedom to locate (or not) their subject within the discipline's history, and, by so doing, to colour subsequent biographical appraisals. The same individual might, then, be represented in different ways; co-opted to fulfil specific and imposed roles—hero, nationalist, pioneer.[18]

The historiographical function of the obituarist—to assess and ascribe the position within the discipline of his or her subject—is pre-empted, to extent, by memoirs and other autobiographical reminiscences.[19] Volumes such as *Recollections of a Revolution* (1984), which brings together individual experiences of geography's quantitative revolution, and *Placing Autobiography in Geography* (2001) and *Geographical Voices* (2002), which represent rather more disparate collections of professional perspectives, illustrate neatly how the personal and everyday—friendships, departmental politics, luck, and misfortune—frame, ineluctably, the practice of geography.[20] Part of a "proliferation of autobiographical reflections", such work advertises the significance of the quotidian detail of everyday life, at once commonplace and idiosyncratic, and its apparent significance in writing the history of geographers and geography.[21]

There is a distinction, then, between what Barnes terms "lives lived" and "lives told"—that is between a narrative which emphasizes professional achievements as a series of taken-for-granted sequential events, and a narrative of practice, which is concerned with the embodied and intimate nature of the geographer at work.[22] The extent to which autobiographical writing in geography succeeds by default in this latter endeavour, however, is somewhat uncertain. Revealing the personal, it is feared, might conceal the professional. For Millward, for example, there is an unfortunate by-product of self-reflexivity in autobiography: "they [the authors] appear to move through their own lives as though nothing—or very little—affects or touches them".[23] Whilst a scholarly attention to the personal life, as it relates to the professional life, might be dismissed merely as avocation, the fact that geography as a *discipline* can be seen as a corollary of geography as a *practice* makes clear the importance of auto/biography as a historical method. There is value in engaging with the "annoyingly complex and uncertain" facets of past lives.[24] In what follows I consider how certain personal and non-academic events in the life of William Morris Davis have enriched and enlivened the narrative of his professional trajectory.

Quotidian biography: some perspectives on William Morris Davis

William Morris Davis, having exerted an important influence upon the establishment of disciplinary geography in the United States, is portrayed typically as the subject's "Dean".[25] The somewhat stuffy connotations of this comparison contrast with a childlike playfulness evident in his personal life. Davis was not only a geomorphologist, but also, with varying degrees of amateurism, a poet, lyricist, artist, sketch writer, playmate, and gymnasium enthusiast.[26] For Chorley, Beckinsale, and Dunn, these different personas form the basis of their extended biographical examination—*The Life and Work of William Morris Davis* (1973).[27] Davis's professional achievements are shown to be a function of his personal life, not abstract from it. The origin of his most significant geomorphological contribution, the cycle of erosion, is seen, for example, to be the result of academic politics, friendship, and chance. The prospect of dismissal from Harvard University in 1883—the result of his inadequate training and an uneasy relationship with the University's president—encouraged Davis to look elsewhere for advancement.[28] By chance he received an invitation from a former teacher to conduct fieldwork in eastern Montana. It was there he encountered the characteristic peneplain landforms whose formation would later be explained in his cycle of erosion.

Self-doubt as to his own professional ability, perhaps the consequence of his experience at Harvard, seems to have remained with Davis throughout his life. In a humorous song, written to mark the American Geographical Society's Transcontinental Excursion of 1912, of which he was head, Davis acknowledged his lack of omniscience: "He cannot tell the age of that formation, / You've got him there, you've got him there".[29] The Excursion, which comprised more than 100 geographers from the Untied States and Europe, was underpinned by serious academic intent, but facilitated importantly by the Dionysian pleasure of an "abundant provision of Budweiser beer".[30] The frivolous Davis revealed by these incidental, although not inconsequential, episodes from the Excursion was paralleled, however,

by a rather more pious aspect to his personality. Having been raised within the Religious Society of Friends, which is informed by the principle of equality under God, Davis inherited a "reaction against artificial positions of authority"—evident in his dealings with Charles Eliot, the president of Harvard.[31]

The interplay of Davis' professional concerns and personal characteristics is evident, also, in the playful and patronal relationship he enjoyed with John Kirtland Wright (1891–1969), the son of a fellow Harvard professor.[32] As a child, Wright formulated an imaginary country, Cravay, for which, under Davis's guidance, he drew "exquisite topographical maps" and composed detailed socio-economic histories.[33] In his advisory role, Davis was incorporated into the social structure of Cravay—appointed to the honorary position of King of Spineall, Duke of Calondit, Marquis of Simfrau, Earl of Celecticus, Prime Minister, and Chief Geologer.[34] Whilst this imaginary exile from the scholarly confines of Cambridge, Massachusetts seems not to have shaped directly Davis's subsequent professional endeavours, it was influential upon Wright's later academic concerns, particularly his interest in perception geography.[35]

Since, as Baker reminds us, "the dead don't answer questionnaires", biographical work depends upon the material traces left by its subject.[36] Given the often intimate and eclectic nature of much of this material, the subject's professional life must apparently be sifted from a personal matrix.[37] Attempting to set apart what is deemed to be noteworthy from this individual context risks obscuring, however, the very events and circumstances in which they arose. For Chorley, Beckinsale, and Dunn, Davis's prolific correspondence—often humorous, personal, and non-professional—was essential to their depiction of him as a professional geomorphologist. As they note, it is "impossible to divorce the person from his ideas and personal achievements".[38] To understand Davis as geomorphologist, it is necessary to understand him, also, as poet, playmate, and Prime Minister of Cravay.

Conclusion: telling lives in geography

In contemplating the value of quotidian events, the historian of geography must consider at what point the details of lives lived are so routine that they are inconsequential to a broader understanding of an individual or his or her position within geography. Does it matter, for example, that William Morris Davis preferred to breakfast on shredded wheat? Surely, since his choice of morning meal cannot be seen to have influenced his choice of geomorphological theory, it has little place in an assessment of his scholarly life. On the other hand, the shredded wheat provided the material sustenance for Davis's prolific scholarship: allowing him to "write and write and write".[39] Historians must distinguish, then, between the facilitative and the explanatory—between the aspects of daily life that enable a particular engagement with geography, and those that direct it. What I wish to suggest is that whilst the scholarly tradition is to place value solely in the latter, the former can also afford useful illumination, serving as more than vignettes. A biographical approach which seeks to situate the professional life within the personal life cannot by definition produce a more valid account, but can show more clearly the important connections between the private and public lives of its subject.

Something of the tension that exists between biographical and a-biographical scholarship is evident, also, in the distinction between quotidian biographies and those histories rooted less firmly in the mundane. In both cases, historians tend to privilege a narrative concerned with disciplinary progress—whether abstract from its practitioners or embodied in them. The personal and commonplace details of individual geographers are considered only where they are seen to illuminate a wider disciplinary concern. To limit the biographies we write to the aspects of geographers' personal lives that seem to correspond directly with their professional achievements is to mute a potentially enlivening palette of individual and subjective experience. The lives lived *by* geographers are, fundamentally, lives lived *as* geographers, and the professional contours of the discipline represent the personal topography

of its participants. There is value, then, beyond the anecdotal, in engaging with the personal, individual, and idiosyncratic aspects of past geographers' lives and attending to their quotidian archival remnants.

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Notes

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6

Songs from before – shaping the conditions for appreciative listening

Hayden Lorimer

Sketching out certain events

Like many a tale of modern life, this one has its first stirrings in a parallel universe. To find out what's under the hammer at eBay.co.uk, the internet-hosted auction site – and at the same time convince myself that I'm still actively researching – I have a system. I run searches according to a standard series of names, published titles and word-strings. Mostly these are book trawls, often to do with on-going biographical inquiries. Illustrative photographs of each lot and its own "bid history" have the power to tantalise. Always, there is the possibility of snapping up a first edition, long sought after, only slightly foxed *and* under-priced. On any given day, you never quite know what obscure out-of-the-way item could just turn up. And it's the prospect of new discoveries, all at the tip of a fast-twitch index finger, that is, of course, the stuff of internet mythology. Category scans based on known specifics (author, seller, subject heading, price, postcode area) spill out into peculiar networks of connection. The simplest inquiry might unfold by serpentine sequence, carried along on links of the most delicate relation, sometimes reflecting little else than personal whim.

All in all, regularly browsing eBay and, as a consequence, getting to know the site's various zones, facilities and capacities, is not so very different from the process of familiarization necessary when navigating a new catalogue of

archival holdings the first few times. Systematic quarrying and learned craft skills pay real dividends, though sometimes give way (all too easily in my experience) to more speculative guesswork and a freer kind of associational searching. But of late, my visits to virtual reality have become something more than that, promising a portal into the social fabric and material textures of lives lived in the recent past. I've entered into a lively trade in memorabilia and vintage collectables, bidding on bundles of cigarette cards, pocket field guides for children, dated motoring maps (the more heavily annotated the better), instruction manuals, used postcards, and area tourist brochures. Once treasured, now mothballed, each item opens a wormhole into others' worlds; proffering hints on once commonplace pastimes and hobbies, or giving directions hither and thither for weekend wanderings in town or up country.[1]

At a stretch, we might regard this habit of shadowing past deeds and customs as the historical geographer's version of 'the character acting method'. In making such a suggestion – of the body at leisure as a possible analogue – I should try to be clear about what I mean. The physical experience of being a beginner can give to the learning body an unfamiliar feel. Following precise instructions on how-to-do the small things that make up an outdoor pursuit (or indoor craft) allow us to be unexpectedly different, sometimes shaped by outmoded or marginalized expressions of popular culture. You might even consider it a creative exercise in re-acquaintance, where geographical imaginations and "known" landscapes are thickened up by kinetics.

Songs from before

With a promise on purchase of transport to an 'unexplored world', the birds' voices (fitting snugly into a cardboard box stained robin's breast red) originally retailed for fifteen shillings. Latterly, they seemed to have enjoyed a strange kind of captivity. Their keeper's sales listing was otherwise given over

entirely to spare parts for Kawasaki motorbikes. A *him*, I imagined. *He* was based in Newport, South Wales. Most likely a "petrol-head", finally getting shot of a family hand-me-down; unwanted, gathering dust and occupying precious shelf space in a suburban garage. A bird's eye view of the address (courtesy of Google Earth) gave the fantasy some foundation. In the absence of any competition, the lot item was mine for a bid of £4.00; packing and postage cost twice that. Dispatched, and safely re-located to my attic study, the bird box took pride of place; a decorative feature, and something to entertain interested friends [See Figure 1].

Figure 1: *Songs of Wild Birds*. Cover label of box set. £4.00

Up until now, that is. In this essay I open the lid and closely scrutinize its contents: a collection of songs from before. I do this for dual purposes. First, to reflect on the scope of researching the experience of sound in the past, and second, to consider how listening might serve to test the limits of method employed in historical geography inquiries. Here is not the place to launch into any extensive consideration of geographers' recent study of sound, music and the spatialities of listening or performance – though their diverse aspects certainly have their play in what follows – other than to note how it is possible to conceive of critical inquiries into sonic environments and cultures of listening particular to places, times and technologies.[2] Accepting the snug confines of the bird box it is still possible to give a feel for the form. Measuring only 12" x 12", it offers effective means to consider how what are now commonplace recording-publishing formats, when originally issued, required the production of new print and sonic practices, in closest alliance. In more practical terms, the essay enables consideration of how research conduct might be determined by the availability of antiquated technologies to reproduce aural worlds, and our abilities to appreciate them.

Natural Pairings

'Within my modest means I have helped to give practical expression to what John Keats sang of the nightingale. "Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird".'[3]

For Max Nicholson (1904-2003) and Ludwig Koch (1881-1971) *Songs of Wild Birds* was the realization of a shared vision and the positive outcome of troubling circumstances. In the mid-winter of 1935, Koch was forced to leave his native Germany, having voiced outspoken criticism of Nazism. A visit from Gestapo officers made clear the necessity of his immediate departure. He took refuge in England. Soon after arrival, the BBC made an all-together friendlier approach. The sound department from Broadcasting House wanted to ensure the safekeeping of Koch's internationally renowned collection of continental birdsong. Anxiously, they learned he had been

unable to arrange passage for the unique wax cylinder and wax disc recordings. Dismay quickly followed. The Gestapo had destroyed everything. On learning of Koch's plight, Julian Huxley and Max Nicholson were among those to extend offers of support. Lifelong bird watcher, nature conservationist, prolific author and socio-political advisor, Nicholson was prominent in a rising generation committed to the serious popularisation of science.[4] He had in mind a collaborative project to revive the pioneering sound-recording work that Koch had begun, though now feared exile might force him to abort. Recording sessions for *Songs of Wild Birds* began in the spring of 1936 and their joint venture was realized within the year. It was the first audiovisual book to be mass produced for a British market.

Ludwig Koch first gained recognition as an opera singer and recording artist in *fin-de-siecle* Germany. Gifted with a fine tenor voice, his talents flowered among the Wagnerian circle at Bayreuth until chronic bronchitis prematurely ended his singing career. Subsequent work as a promoter of music festivals and exhibitions brought him different notice in the gramophone industry then flourishing in the Weimar Republic. Appointed head of the newly established cultural and educational wing of Electric and Musical Industries (EMI) he experimented with technologies for field recording, documenting sounds from nature, and capturing 'sound pictures' of metropolitan life. From the security of a company position Koch was able to advance his own 'Sound-Book' concept; a novel merchandising format boasting the integration of 'TEXT – PICTURES – SOUND' (by means of an accompanying gramophone record). Differently themed series were launched to general success. A number were designed around recordings of birdsong, the pursuit of which remained for Koch a governing passion and his lifetime's main diversion.

The obsession surfaced early. In his *Memoirs of a Birdman* Koch was proud to recount how, aged only eight, he had produced the world's very first recording of birdsong, or 'sound autograph'.[5] The claim is credible, though the history of technical inquiries into birdsong dates back considerably earlier. In 1773, Daines

Barrington (a friend to Gilbert White of Selbourne) suggested that all bird song be subject to critical appraisal. He set out a register of expressive qualities – 'Mellowness of Tone', 'Sprightly' or 'Plaintive' notes, 'Compass' and 'Execution' – by which songs could be appreciated and graded. Barrington considered the nightingale unrivalled as a songster; it achieved a top score of 90 on his 100 point scale. Sonic measures were still being refined and orders of merit disputed in 1935 when William Alexander drew up his own chart ranking the songs and breeding calls of British birds. Intervention as a means of improvement had even been considered. In 1800, Dr Gainborg of Copenhagen floated the idea that wild birds whose voices were generally regarded as amateurish would, on being held in captivity, benefit from singing lessons given by masters of the art. Nightingale and canary recitals were planned to improve overall levels of avian competency. His outlandish scheme proved little, but the continent-wide fashion for caging song birds as lively domestic ornaments proved most durable. Koch himself was instrumental in demonstrating how the quality of birds' songs was much diminished by household confinement. Only when left undisturbed and untamed in natural settings would they project the very best of themselves. With his mastery of the latest recording technology Koch pioneered methods for 'imprisoning' only the prettiness of song, leaving the bird in the wild. For an audience of inquisitive listeners, the gramophone player (prior to that, the phonogram) and ebonite discs promised a new technology and format for sound reproduction. For the likes of Koch and Nicholson, who were in the business of shaping an educated attitude and ear, the availability of the gramophone pointed up a need for greater public understanding of exactly how sound was captured, and the ambient conditions necessary for its proper appreciation in recorded form.

Outer ear

For the task of recording in the open air, Koch's every effort was directed towards securing a particular sonic kind of authenticity. As the chief quality

to be secured, it is paradoxical that naturalism of sound very often necessitated isolating the desired birdsong from its surrounding habitat. Practical measures could be taken to ensure only the soloist's presence, although the calls of another bird in the vicinity might be tolerable, and sometimes regarded a welcome addition. The close proximity of unwanted sounds was not the only difficulty to be overcome. The fact that sound carried on the wind could be a blessing, but just as often it was Koch's natural enemy. The presence, and the effect, of background ambience in a recording were difficult to gauge whilst *in situ*. However, landscapes full of noise – the din of a passing goods train or the drone of distant traffic – were unacceptable and unhelpful. Nicholson and Koch could be heavily prescriptive, listing those elements of environmental setting that allowed for the fullest appreciation of birdsong:

'…it belongs by nature to places where it forms almost the only pattern of continuous sound, and where there is only perhaps the noise of a light breeze, the ripple of running water, the mechanical music of insects, and occasional mammalian grunts, squeaks or roars to serve as a foil to its freshness and exuberance.'[6]

In *Songs of Wild Birds* these kinds of circumstantial detail and protocol for field recording were given full description. Koch penned an explanatory chapter 'How I Collect Bird-Songs' illustrated with photographs of the mobile recording studio. The custom-built truck (its side panels emblazoned with distinctive Parlophone signwriting) had trundled along Home Counties' byways in a season-long search for song [See Figure 2]. Insights were given on the workings and the vagaries of this very large box of tricks. Staffed by up to five engineers and electricians and a driver (Mr Harry Hands), complete with strengthened undercarriage, it needed to be parked and jacked up on level ground so as not to disturb the sensitive machinery during recording

Figure 2: Mobile recording unit. *Songs of Wild Birds.*
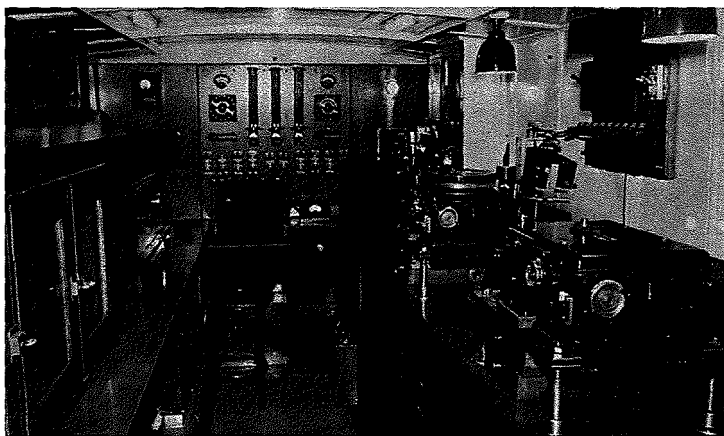

Figure 3: Inner workings. *Songs of Wild Birds.*

[See Figure 3]. Unfortunately, birds' preferred singing stands would sometimes be at some remove (up to one mile in distance) from the nearest convenient road, or track. Connecting cables would have to be laid out across all sorts of terrain, until the microphone post was in range of the bird's performance. Exacting in his demands for discipline, precision and well-drilled technique, Koch' s descriptions dwelled on the logistics of putting his team and technology in relative position. A recognized system for signaling the onset of song was all-important. Inside the truck, heating racks were installed to keep the wax discs at the correct temperature for the purposes of recording. To obtain optimal results, recording was begun in anticipation of birdsong; and as a result very often documented only 'dead air'. Unsurprisingly, none of this could happen cheaply. Koch and Nicholson were more noticeably protective of trade secrets in sound. Little technical information was offered on the innards of the mobile unit or of outdoor recording gear, on the studio-based treatment of recorded sound (an emerging field of science explored in the "transfer rooms" at Parlophone HQ on Abbey Road), or processes for editing sound as a means to produce a better likeness.

Happy to cast himself the enigmatic adventurer in sound, in print-format Koch took listeners to the scenes behind-the-sounds, chronicling precious moments alone, chance recordings, tales of the ones-that-got-away, chill vigils awaiting the dawn chorus, frustrating waits in vain, and edgy escapades on the narrowest of cliff ledges. In photographs, wearing his signature black beret, woolen sweater and the heaviest of trench-coats, Koch seems to have stilled himself for the sensational moment, already listening hard well before the shutter closed to capture the pose [See Figure 4]. His ear tilted habitually, downwards to the loudspeaker, or cupped inside a headphone set. His face lined by a beatific smile, his skin wan, with a luminescent quality. His stare always elsewhere, in a far away look, set upward to the skies. He was a man most adept, and at ease, when listening intently [See Figure 5].[7]
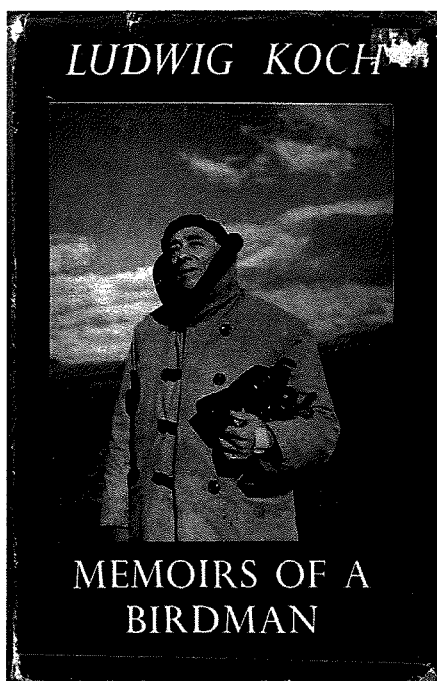
Figure 4: Cover portrait of Ludwig Koch. *Memoirs of a Birdman*

Figure 5: Koch stilled for sound. *Memoirs of a Birdman*

Inner ear

'As the nightingale's voice escaped from its ebonite prison under the touch of the needle and the scientific magic of the sound-box, I felt myself transported to dusk in an April copse-wood.'[8]

Working in combination, the sound-book and the gramophone promised to bring sonorous birdsong into the sobriety of the British drawing-room, and so whisk the imaginative listener to inner soundscapes elsewhere. Listening at home could be a troubling business too. Encounters with foreign or ghostly sounds in domestic space led some to fear the uncanny. Other listeners, as yet unacquainted with the workings of the "sound-box" needed to be made observant of certain technical rudiments. Not the least of these was how playing the record at the standard speed was essential for synchronization with the sequenced and timed commentary provided in text:

'Commentary Record 2A

Min.	Sec.	
0	22	Gusts of wind stimulate the *robin*, but the noise is distorted in reproduction, and does not sound much like wind as we hear it ordinarily
0	35	After the robin's seventh song-phrase is completed we leave him.

Band

		and change over to the *wren*, who beings singing at
0	39	and goes on five seconds, with his characteristic song taking on a new lease of life just as it seems to come to an end. Towards its close a *woodpigeon* is cooing in the background, and at
0	45	a *blackbird* interrupts with a mellow song phrase.[9]

Instruction extended to readying the room for the sound-event. The dusk hour was ideal, said to produce in the listener a gathering sense of enclosure. Artificial illumination overhead should be turned off, and table lamps heavily shaded. Sufficient natural light should be left for the face of a time-piece (all-important) to remain visible. Seating arrangements should allow a relaxed but

attentive posture, for it was just as necessary to ready the self. Although static and sedentary, the physical experience of listening was considered demanding and should only be undertaken when distractions were few, and attention likely to be undivided.

The sound-scene depicted on the box's cover [See Figure 1] suggests a suburban form of evensong; non-elitist, secular, trim, brilliantined, starched and buttoned-up. Thus the act of listening was figured as a private, pure, and quite probably solitary, pleasure. By giving 'your whole attention to the singer' and listening repeatedly, Nicholson predicted that diagnostic skills would be quickly attained. With mounting confidence, the studious listener was encouraged to self-test, breaking the known sequence of songs by gently dropping the gramophone needle onto the open bands that separated the grooved sections of the disc.

Suitably galvanized, listeners were encouraged to try putting on records at the same time as allowing natural birdsong emanating from the garden to drift through an open window. With advanced powers of recognition and discrimination, the sound-book would function as a new kind of portraiture. Julian Huxley's product endorsement – 'To hear [these] records is to obtain a true picture of the birds' voices'[10] – suggests phenomena best apprehended by hybrid faculties, the hearing-eye and seeing-ear. Listeners alive to possibilities for aural experimentation, and in possession of a wind-up (or "picnic") gramophone, could plan a motoring trip to take reproduced birdsong from the indoors back out. Woodland glades, and the known territories of singing males, were recommended as the most promising settings for tempting return calls from wild birds. The socialization of reproduced sound was acceptable but needed regulation and care in the conditioning of setting. Public performances of the records, in venues either indoor or out, required special permission to be granted by the authors. Conceding the inevitability of limitations and imperfections in audibility,

Nicholson and Koch could offer suggestions on needle type according to the shape and size of function room being used for any performance.

Lost in translation

'We may build up in birdsong a background to our own lives, but it remains in essence as mysterious and as eternal as the sea, which one must meet on its own terms in all its moods in order to enjoy something of the strength and the wisdom and the patience latent in it.'[11]

Of birdsong, Ludwig Koch was a self-confessed fanatic. Max Nicholson's interest in the life of birds was more rounded and certainly not limited to song. Differences accepted, both men were agreed on the possibility that birds' took joy in the utterance of song. And both were well versed in human odes to birdsong. For poets and philosophers, bird voices quickly exceeded systematic, technical or musicological appreciation. They held the power to elevate the soul, to haunt the human condition, and tempt the boldest of interpretations. How song was heard was thus an intensely personal matter. Reviewing his life's work on the BBC radio program *Desert Island Discs*, Nicholson conceded himself 'not a musical person'. His appraisal of Koch's ornithological knowledge was similarly frank: 'he didn't really know much about birds'. This neat asymmetry of expertise – one man determinedly bird-minded, the other boasting a classicist's ear – was quite probably the foundation for sound conduct and collaboration in the field and recording studio.[12] Nicholson fondly remembered 'all the lovely times' spent together. As island castaway, among his seven discs he chose to include Koch's favourite piece of music, Mozart's *Der Vogel Wenger ban ish Jahr*.[13]

For his part, Nicholson considered birdsong a promising medium by which to learn more of relationships between birds, humans and different environments. New inquiries could, he outlined, be figured according to the scientific advances already being made through holistic studies of bird behaviour.[14] There were, for example, intriguing questions concerning the geography of song that connected the place and the manner of delivery.

Variations in vocal style – producing regional dialects – were identified among birds of the same species. Song could be even more locally particularized; significant differences being detectable between, and even within, areas of woodland. Thus, for the undertaking of any categorical survey by sound, issues were immediately raised over the identification of norms in song performance for any species. Beyond geography and seasonality, it was possible to puzzle endlessly over internal phrasing and patterns of notes, better to differentiate between song and sub-song, principal call notes and breeding notes. Or, with some knowledge of musicological theory, it was possible to systematize specific elements (duration, interval, pitch, timbre, resonance and modulation) of song.

Although deepening levels of explanation of song were possible according to increasingly detailed courtship, nesting and territory theories, on one matter Nicholson was of clearest conviction. Science would be mistaken in imagining the existence of a code with which it might be possible to crack the secret language of birds. Experimental efforts at deciphering meaning were, he believed, likely to be of only limited use.[15] Meanwhile, attempts at replication according to phonetics or the rhythmic patterns of the spoken word (say, for example, the yellowhammer's song rendered as "a little bit of bread and no chee-ese"), were effective as sonic descriptors, and as *aide-memoire* for call recognition, but little else besides. Moreover, speech-based approximations of birdsong were often idiomatic; that is circumscribed by human geographies of common language use.[16] Nicholson also knew that there were bio-acoustic controls on method in the emerging field of sound-based inquiries. Since the spectrum of sound wave frequencies audible to birds is considerably greater than it is for humans 'we must not overlook the possibility', he observed, 'that when we say a blackbird sings better than a wren we may merely mean that a blackbird keeps his song within a range of frequencies pleasant to our ears, while the wren performs at an altogether higher range than our capacity to appreciate the sounds, and even to distinguish or remember them, is inferior and blurred.'[17]

A version of later events

'Birdsong is the most universal voice of the earth…The wind and the sea alone are more persistent and widespread.'[18]

Although an oft overlooked feature of our ordinary habitats and environments for living, once noticed, birdsong has the easy capacity to charm. The BBC's relationship with birdsong, first established through Ludwig Koch's recording work, has continuing life. When the bells of "Big Ben" – London's landmark clock-tower – recently underwent an overhaul, their chimes were temporarily silenced, leaving the BBC in search of a replacement sound to herald in the flagship evening news broadcast on Radio 4. Different songs of wild birds were chosen daily for the fanfare; to mixed reception. Contemporary settings for bird song can be even less likely. A delayed flight to Belfast (to attend the *Practicing Historical Geography* conference) left ample time to explore the departure lounge of Glasgow airport. Here bird song is piped in as ambience; an airy, if rather cheerless, soundtrack to bland retail and eating experiences. Recorded song can be made mobile too. Owing to their popularity, Koch's earliest nature recordings were later re-issued on vinyl (33rpm). Today, with relative ease their sounds can be digitized, and are thus transferable to formats suitable for listening (to say nothing of diagnostic self-testing) whilst on the move. But the original set of instructions for listening still appeal. To the novice, eBay offers a bewildering range of gramophones, with prices to suit any pocket: electrical or clockwork; in very different states of repair, all the way from broken ('in need of TLC') to specialist models buffed up lovingly by antique dealers. But, I'm choosey enough to be holding out for what seems most appropriate: a 1930's Parlophone "picnic" machine. And time is still on my side. Spring is the breeding season, and best suited to outdoor experimentation with recordings and wild song.

One song line remains. Since I began work on this essay, autumn has blustered by and – although barely distinguishable in feel – December has ushered in the mildest of winters. With each passing week, I've become more familiar with the exhilarating repertory of one bird. Our paths cross on the days when I walk to

work early. For its song-stage the thrush has chosen an exposed branch, one of several overhanging the perimeter fence of the botanical gardens. Directly opposite, across the road and behind a strip of high shrubs, are the BBC Scotland studios. In the murk of dawn, before the traffic begins to build, it's possible to stand silently, on the pavement beneath the tree, ears cocked, listening to songs from before.

Notes

[1] For a more extended consideration of the possible uses of eBay as a research tool in historical scholarship see, D. DeLyser, A. Curtis, and R. Sheehan, Using e-Bay for research in historical geography *Journal of Historical Geography* **30** (2004) 764-82.

[2] L. Kong, Popular music in geographical analysis *Progress in Human Geography* **19** (1995) 183-98; A. Leyshon, D. Matless, and G. Revill, *The place of music* (London 1998); G. Revill, Music and the politics of sound *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **18** (2000) 597-613; G. Revill, English pastoral: music, landscape, history and politics, in Cook, I. Crouch, D. Naylor, S. and J. Ryan, (Eds.) *Cultural turns/geographical turns*, (London 2000); S. Smith, Performing the (sound)world *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **18** (2000) 615-37; D. Matless, Action and noise over a hundred years: the making of a nature region *Body and Society* **6** (2000) 141-65; N. Wood, and S. Smith, Instrumental routes to emotional geographies *Social and Cultural Geography* **4** (2004) 522-48; D. Matless, Sonic geography in a nature region *Social and Cultural Geography* **6** (2005) 745-66; B. Anderson, F. Morton, and G. Revill, Practices of music and sound *Social and Cultural Geography* **6** (2005) 639-44; J. Gold, and G. Revill, Gathering the voices of the people? Cecil Sharp, cultural hybridity and the folk music of Appalachia, in Brunn, S. and Waterman, S. (Eds.) *Music and geography* (Amsterdam, 2006).

[3] L. Koch, *Memoirs of a birdman* (London, 1955).

[4] H. Macdonald, "What makes you a scientist is the way you look at things": ornithology and the observer, 1930-55 *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* **33** (2002) 53-77.

[5] Koch, *Memoirs of a birdman*.

[6] E.M. Nicholson and L. Koch, *Songs of wild birds* (London, 1937) 186.

[7] Koch later attained 'personality' status through a long association with wireless broadcasts for the BBC. As an émigré his was to become an unmistakable voice for nature lovers, heavily accented and habitually at odds with English diction. Friends' affectionate anecdotes hinge on his mispronunciation of words beginning with 'v' and 'w'. The habit also made Koch an obvious target for Peter Sellers' lampooning of foreign tongues. *A Salute to Ludwig Koch*, (LP BBC Wildlife Series No. 1, 1969); *Ludwig Koch – Recollections and recordings* (LP BBC Wildlife Series No. 6, 1970); see also, *Hunting by Ear: the sound book of fox-hunting* [recorded by Ludwig Koch, text commentary by D.W.E. Brock, introduced by Michael F. Berry] (London, 1960).

[8] Nicholson and Koch, *Songs of wild birds.*, xiv

[9] *Ibid*, 201

[10] A. Huxley, 'Foreword', in Nicholson and Koch *Songs of wild birds*, xiii

[11] Nicholson and Koch, *Songs of wild birds*, 184

[12] A second compilation of birdsong followed in quick succession: E.M. Nicholson, and L. Koch, *More songs of wild birds* (London, 1937).

[13] http://www.maxnicholson.com

[14] Macdonald, "What makes you a scientist".

[15] Compare with: Rothenburg, D. *Why birds sing: one man's quest to solve an everyday mystery* (London, 2005)

[16] This much must have been immediately apparent to Nicholson and Koch as a bilingual research pairing. German terminal syllables, such as 'Reiterzug' or 'Schwarzgebühr', did not easily map onto to the English language. Nicholson was similarly guarded on the possibilities of employing musical notation to render birdsong conceivable.

[17] Nicholson and Koch, *Songs of wild birds*, 3

[18] *Ibid*, 185

Planning Piccadilly – methods and sources for re-interpreting 1960s London

Bronwen Edwards and David Gilbert

The urban plan has long been a key source for historical geographers, and this contribution concerns the interpretation of plans and planning in archival collections. Clearly some archives can provide us with rich documentary detail about the planning process itself, and where good records exist we are able to get at least a partial sense of planning as a contested political process. One common observation about the analysis of different drafts of plans, and accompanying textual records of committee minutes, negotiations, or consultation exercises is that we need to be careful to think about how certain voices are present in the archive, while others are absent or excluded. We should also think about whether the planning process as recorded reflects the underlying power of significant interests.

Such issues are important in the interpretation of archival sources, but here we want to suggest some additional questions and approaches that extend analysis in important ways. Running through all of these is a sense of plans not as the product of a single planner or group of planners, but as something much more complex, polyvocal and intertextual. We want to argue, firstly, that in some situations it makes sense to think of planning not simply as a process, but also as an event or series of events, that may be staged-managed by planners or politicians, but which can also become more public or media events. Secondly, we argue that plans need to be seen as fantasies about the urban. In some senses this is obvious; even the most ordinary plan is about

imagining how things could be different. But working in this way encourages us to think of a plan, particularly in the form of diagrams, models or drawings, as a material object, a designed object, with a visual, symbolic register that can work with or against the text that describes it. Thirdly, we argue that plans need to be thought of in terms of movement. While a great strength of archival work is that it encourages engagement with plans as material objects, a potential danger is that this is can encourage a static approach, in which the plan pins down or freezes the city at a particular moment. The historical geographer, more than the design or architectural historian, needs to read plans not just as evidence about buildings and functional zones, but also as explicitly and substantially about flows and movements through the spaces of the city.

This approach draws directly on the cultural historian Frank Mort's recent work on Patrick Abercrombie's famous plans of the 1940s.[1] Mort moves away from existing histories which stress planning as policy and evaluate its success or failure, towards a focus on the cultural origins and effects of these programmes for the redevelopment of London after the war. Mort pays particular attention to the visual imagery of the plans and their accompanying publicity, which he argues had 'a significant impact on the way that the city was reimagined in the professional and popular media.'[2] Interpreting the plans iconographically enables him to argue that they 'possessed a rich fantasy life, in that they dramatized elaborate and highly inventive images of the city, as much as actual policies for the rebuilding of London.'[3] For Mort the plans were also public events, promoted through exhibitions and special publications. The Abercrombie plans were exercises in morale-boosting and modern, utopian education, to be set in the context of the war effort. What Mort's work does is to show how close engagement with a wider range of sources enables important subtexts in the plans to be drawn out. For example, he complicates the common reading of the Abercrombie plans as decentralist, and even anti-metropolitan, to show that there was also a strong vision of metropolitan modernisation, that sought to remake central London as a fittingly modern capital of nation and empire.

The sources discussed in this chapter allow a similar investigation of the cultural contexts of planning during London's next phase of development. The examples here are taken from plans for Piccadilly Circus between the late 1950s and the early 1970s. During this period, there was a whole series of plans for the comprehensive redevelopment of the Circus and the surrounding area, none of which were realised. Piccadilly Circus in the 1950s was not very different from its present form, with Alfred Gilbert's statue of Eros in the middle of a chaotic traffic junction, surrounded by a variety of Victorian and early twentieth century buildings, and large, brightly illuminated advertising displays. Piccadilly was (and indeed remains) pivotal in the geography of the West End, a place that had long functioned as a centre for popular revelling and was fondly known as 'the heart of Empire'. It was a place where 'theatreland', 'clubland' and the illicit and cosmopolitan attractions of Soho intersected with the West End's most fashionable shopping area. By the 1950s, this place was catching the eye of newly powerful agents: modernist urban planners, commercial property developers and traffic engineers, all seeking to transform the West End. But the area was also central in other kinds of urban transformation, particularly in fashion, shopping and more general cultures of consumption. Piccadilly Circus was only a stone's throw away from Carnaby Street, the site of 'Swinging London' in the mid-1960s. Our interest in the Piccadilly plans came out of a research project on these changes, and we were concerned to see whether these dramatic developments in urban culture had influenced more formal visions for the city. New attitudes to consumer culture that appear only indirectly in the formal rationales of plans for Piccadilly Circus are much more discernable, for example, in the accompanying visual images.

This approach uncovers a richness and diversity of archival material surrounding the published planning documents, scattered across different repositories. In the case of the Piccadilly proposals, important records are held in collections at the City of Westminster Archives, London Metropolitan Archives and the Public Record Office, while the University of Liverpool holds the papers of William Holford, the principal planner acting for local government. These archives hold copies of the plans, and

supporting papers that document the processes and cultures of professional planning: planning committee minutes, transcripts from government debates, personal and professional correspondence between planners and politicians, architects, developers and landowners. But there are other, more ephemeral records that help us understand the existence of planning in the public realm: there are photographs of architectural models and their press launches. There are press cuttings from newspapers and professional journals which record debates, events and shifts in direction, gauging reactions. There are also preliminary drawings and annotated street plans and maps [See Figure 1].
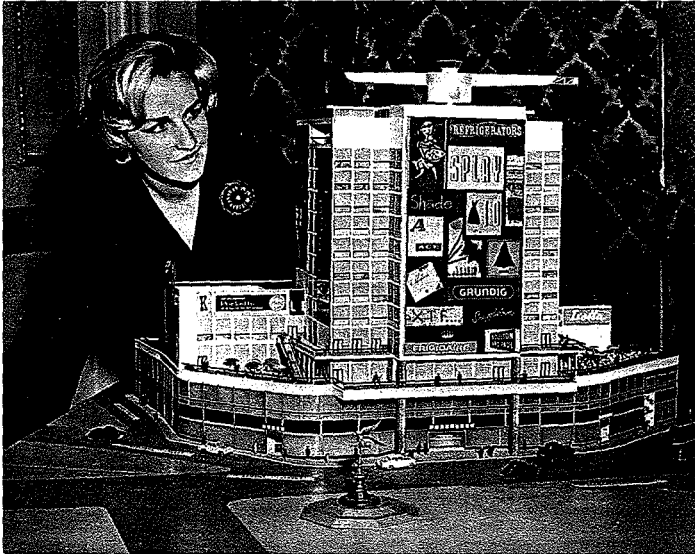
Figure 1: EVENTS.
Illustrated London News, 28 November 1959, p.761.

In this picture, a glamorous young woman poses for camera, whilst casting an eye over an architectural model: brash, modern and covered in vivid advertising slogans. The woman smiles, perhaps a little incredulous that such a building should take root in the 'Heart of Empire'. For this was the

building proposed by property developer Jack Cotton for the north side of Piccadilly Circus, to replace the well-loved Monico Café. The photograph was published in the *Illustrated London News* on 28 November 1959 in an article entitled 'The future of Piccadilly Circus: argument and uproar over plans', and preserved in the newspaper cuttings collection at the City of Westminster Archives, as one of a series of important markers in the history of Piccadilly Circus, amid reports of traffic congestion and images of New Years' Eve revelling. For our purposes, this is evidence of planning-as-event, capturing the moment when the quiet professional and bureaucratic processes of planning were interrupted by an unforeseen and tumultuous public phase which took place at press launches and exhibitions, in heated government debates in County Hall and the Houses of Parliament and on the pages of the London and national press.

This event seems out of sync with the planning process: final planning permission for the building had already been granted subject to minor details, and demolition had begun. Indeed, the readers of the *Illustrated London News* might have been presented with the *fait accompli* of a completed new Monico building. But the developer had an overwhelming desire for his part in the remaking of post-war London to be transferred from behind the closed doors of County Hall to the public stage. On October 27 1959 Cotton held a press conference to unveil his proposals, unwittingly unleashing a furore that would ultimately lead to a Public Inquiry and the project's abandonment. In the debate that raged over the following weeks and months, no-one had a good word to say about the (non-human) model in the photograph: Bernhard Levin wrote in *The Spectator* about 'The Monster of Piccadilly'[4] and Malcolm MacEwen dubbed it 'Chewing Gum House' on national television.[5] Next to the photograph extracts from government sessions were reported:

'Mr Robinson (Labour) thought the proposal vulgar and unimaginative, while Mr Bevan (Labour) asked for a planned development of the site which would satisfy national sentiment and not only the London County Council. In the Lords, Lord Conesford asked, "What has London, in all its glorious history, done to deserve this fate?"'[6]

It was clear that the prevarications over building lines and parking spaces that had preoccupied the planning officers were now dwarfed by broader public and political concerns about the relationship between architecture, space and London's identity. This event was clearly beyond the control of planners and applicants. Whereas few pored over the planning application forms and architectural drawings or attended the planning committee meetings, millions observed and participated in the planning event in the public arena. These were the years when the politics of planning protest were developing, special interest groups galvanising, and planning process was forced to take new account of the public's view.

If the press conference was a huge blunder by Cotton, his hubris does leave us with evidence about the urban fantasies of the commercial property speculators of the period. The picture published in the *Illustrated London News* shows how far Cotton's presentation of his proposals had departed from the sober professional approach practiced by establishment architects of the period, moving instead towards the arts of public relations. The most eye-catching feature of the model is the vast space for illuminated advertising, Cotton's attempt to modernise the commercial spectacle of Piccadilly. The object at the top of the 52 m tower is a permanent crane designed to facilitate rapid change of the displays (indeed in an artist's impression of the tower showed an alternative advert, with the slogan 'Snap, Plom for Vigour' in giant letters). Even the model cars in front of the model hint at the deal Cotton struck with the Planning Committee of the London County Council; in return for squeezing the pedestrian pavements back close to the line of the two-storey podium building, allowing widening of the roadway and the cutting away most of the old Monico corner, Cotton was permitted to squeeze in more square footage for his profitable office development than was normally allowed (See Figure 2).

A very different version of Piccadilly Circus was on the table three years later: a vision of pedestrian plazas, high level walkways and striking modern architecture of a rather better pedigree. This was an illustration published in
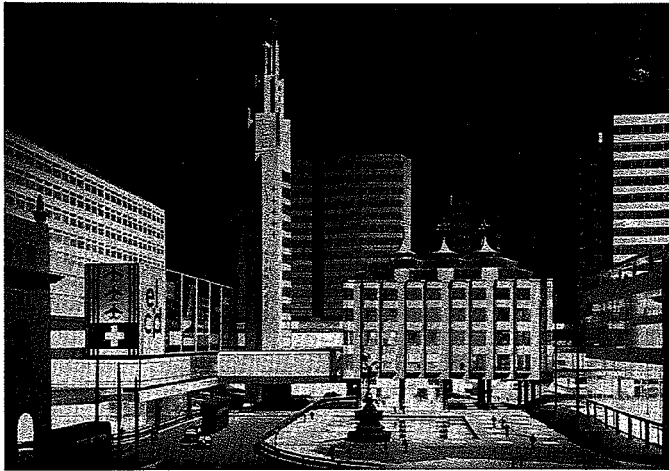
The Piazza looking east towards the New London Pavilion.   Photos: Sam Lambert

Figure 2: FANTASIES. Piccadilly Circus Future Development: Proposals for Comprehensive Development by the Planning Consultant Sir William Holford, March 1962.

the Piccadilly Circus plan prepared for the LCC by eminent planner William Holford in 1962.[7] This context is highly significant: this was a plan for comprehensive, local government-led development of the Circus, rather than Cotton's piecemeal approach. This had been demanded at the Public Inquiry into the Monico proposal. The expected procedural dryness of the planning document contrasts with the essential vibrancy of images like this. And where the text of the report contains careful discussion of floor levels, guard-rails and view points, the images speak far more eloquently of Holford's vision for London's heart.

Holford had specifically been instructed that his plan 'could not lay down rigid requirements in matters of design and appearance', yet the visual vocabulary of these images gave a clear message. [8] The modernity of the vision reflected a 1960s confidence in the new and the stylistically modern, with little concern for preserving the characterful historic fabric of this iconic London site, or its irregular footprint, which was to be straightened and

ironed to produce the necessary right angles. The only remaining traces of historic London here were the tip of the County Fire Office in the bottom left hand corner, and the central statue of Eros, both dwarfed by the scale and bombast of the new. The images from Holford's plan were widely reproduced in newspapers and architectural journals, where they were much praised. This, interestingly, suggests that the vociferous objections to the Monico proposal had little to do with preserving the Circus, and everything to do with protecting it from commercial developers [See Figure 3].

The clash of cultures between the architectural and the commercial is articulated most clearly in the private and professional letters Holford wrote whilst working on the plan, now held in the Holford Archive at the University of Liverpool. He wrote to an architect friend about the problem of 'the great hoard of savage developers who are roaming through the forests of Piccadilly Circus and its environs'[9] Jack Cotton was one of these men, and Holford noted privately 'J.C. wants to develop a site for purposes of his own choosing, to the maximum extent and risk that is feasible and profitable and with as much floor and advertising space (and as little parking and pavement space) as the authorities will permit.'[10] Cotton had wisely answered his critics after the Public Inquiry by appointing Walter Gropius, modern architect of international renown and old friend of Holford, to redesign his Monico building. Holford's papers show that during this period Cotton was pushing hard for his interests to be represented in Holford's plan, whilst Holford simply refused to engage with someone he saw as a bully, negotiating only with the architectural players. He wrote to Gropius in the letter illustrated here, 'I am not so happy … about discussing ideas with Mr Jack Cotton …. his methods and objectives are the reverse of architectural, and he is a master of the art of making progress by publicity and pressure!'[11]

To return to the plan's illustration, it represents a clear response to the perceived vulgar commerciality of Cotton's Monico proposal. Certainly, the hub in Holford's plan is the pedestrian plaza, flanked by the rebuilt London Pavilion and Criterion theatres. Commercial activity is allowed in, but kept

Figure 3: letter from William Holford to Walter Gropius, 5 September 1960. Holford Archive, University of Liverpool.

under careful architectural control. A crisp-edged horizontal strip of tasteful advertising hovers in front of the Monico site: gone is the chaotic neon of the building-as hoarding. The tall office slabs are set back in a second tier of buildings on the periphery. This Piccadilly Circus is a space for the civic actor to inhabit: although surrounded by shops and offices, the space is designed primarily for non-commercial public life, for people to promenade or rest in the open.
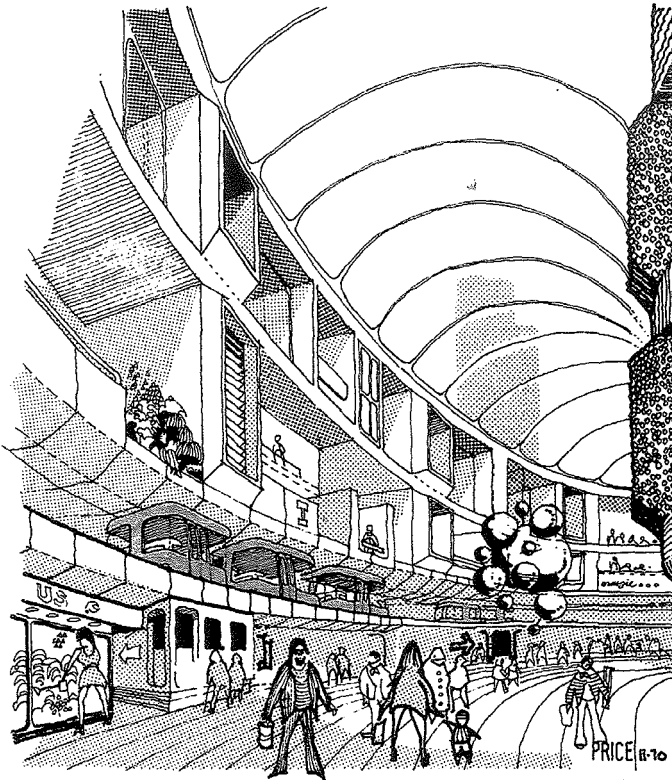
Figure 4: MOVEMENTS. *An Aid to Pedestrian Movement: A Report by a Working Party on The Introduction of a New Mode of Transport in Central London,* (1971) London: Westminster City Council.

It was a concern with managing urban movement that increasingly drove ideas about replanning London and made it increasingly difficult to find a solution to the problem of Piccadilly Circus. The issue was that there was a fundamental incompatibility between two kinds of movement taking place there: pedestrian and vehicular. All agreed that something needed to be done about the fact that 'the murderous traffic conditions can only get worse, and it will be Lethe rather than Eros who will be patron spirit of Piccadilly.'[12] But in his 1962 planning document, Holford raised doubts about whether the traditional role of the Circus as a place of public resort could be reconciled with his brief to increase traffic capacity. He wrote,

'To increase the vehicle traffic capacity of the Circus by a much larger factor than [twenty percent] would reduce the freedom of pedestrian movement, and the attraction of the place; it would be inconsistent with the design of the buildings and public spaces proposed in this scheme of redevelopment, and at the same time lessen the reasonable expectation of improved rents and values and of public benefit to justify the cost...'[13]

Over the next few years, as Holford repeatedly reworked his plans, he was increasingly frustrated by the growing muscle of traffic engineers in deciding the future shape of London, blocking his attempts to act for the pedestrian. Growing out of the stalemate at Piccadilly Circus and new efforts at Covent Garden, one manifestation of the current thinking about routes and flows was the report 'An Aid to Pedestrian Movement' of 1971, published by was a new working party on 'The Introduction of a New Mode of Transport in Central London'. The Working Party was a joint project between the Ministries of Transport and Technology, and planning and transport interests at the GLC and Westminster City Council, trying to find a way forward which took account of much higher volumes of all kinds of traffic. It proposed a revolutionary elevated rail network which would snake around existing buildings and through new developments, high above the road traffic and pedestrian decks, stretching right across central London, linking Oxford Circus, Piccadilly Circus to the Aldwych and South Bank.

This scheme was explicitly about facilitating particular kinds of movement in the city, aiming to:

'satisfy the needs of the commuter travelling between the point where he leaves a conventional method of transport and his place of work; connect with the main points of tourist attraction, and provide speedy access to the main shopping centres not only for the all day shopper but also for the worker who is shopping during the lunch hour. They would also transport visitors to and from the many places of evening entertainment situated in the West End of London'.[14]

These movements were in large part, therefore, the efficient, short journeys associated with commercial life and consumption activity, taking place within a modern, substantially replanned metropolis.

It is important to contrast the report's graphic register both with its prosaic text, and with the representational approaches of earlier proposals for comprehensive planning. The futuristic spaces in the images are filled with fashionable consumers rather than sober citizens, who peruse window displays and wander through the city carrying bags of shopping, dressed in the garb of Swinging London's fashionable boutiques. While the text of the report counts journey times and maps out routes, the visual component makes connections with the 'unplanned' yet dynamic *real* consumer spaces such as Carnaby Street a few yards from the Circus. In this image there is still a melding between the new consumer culture and the desire to completely sweep away the old. However, the lasting cultural effect was felt more in moves for architectural conservation in central London, such as the campaign to save Covent Garden in early 1970s. While few of Carnaby Street's boutiques survived much beyond the end of the 1960s, the movement had a lasting impact on the revalorisation of the pleasures and potential profitability of the existing urban fabric of the West End.

Notes

[1] F. Mort, Fantasies of metropolitan life: planning London in the 1940s *Journal of British Studies* **43** (2004) 120-151.

[2] Mort 2004, 124.

[3] Mort 2004, 124.

[4] B. Levin, The Monster of Piccadilly Circus *The Spectator* 11 December 1959, 867.

[5] Reported in *Architect's Journal* 5 November 1959.

[6] *Illustrated London News*, 28 November 1959, 761.

[7] *Piccadilly Circus future development: proposals for comprehensive development by the planning consultant Sir William Holford* (London 1962). City of Westminster Archives. 711.409421.

[8] *Piccadilly Circus future development* 1962, 3.

[9] Letter from Holford to architect Noel Moffett, 29June 1960. Holford Archive, University of Liverpool. D147/c/45.

[10] Note by Holford, 18 January 1961. Holford Archive, University of Liverpool. D147/c/45.

[11] Letter from William Holford to Walter Gropius, 5 September 1960. Holford Archive, University of Liverpool. D147/c/45.

[12] *Manchester Guardian*, 4 October 1958.

[13] *Piccadilly Circus Future Development,* 1962 , 6.

[14] *An aid to pedestrian movement: a report by a working party on the introduction of a new mode of transport in central London,* London 1971, 12. City of Westminster Archives 388.41.