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The Changing Practices of Human Geography: An Introduction**Practising human geography?**

Let us begin by imagining two different human geographers, one we will call Carl and the other Linda. Both these are human geographers who believe that at least part of what human geography entails is the actual 'practising' of human geography: the practical 'doing' of it in the sense of leaving the office, the library and the lecture hall for the far less cosy 'real world' beyond and, in seeking to encounter this world in all its complexity, to find out new things about the many peoples and places found there, to make sense of what may be going on in the lives of these peoples and places and, subsequently, to develop ways of representing their findings back to other audiences who may not have enjoyed the same first-hand experience. Both of them are enthralled, albeit sometimes also a little daunted, by everything that is involved in this practical activity. Both of them are convinced there is an important purpose in such activity, both because it enriches their own accounts and because it can produce new 'knowledge' which will be eye-opening, thought-provoking and perhaps useful to other people and agencies (whether these be other academics, students, policy-makers or the wider public). For both of them, too, this practical activity

is something they usually find enjoyable, fun even, and both of them would wish to communicate this importance and enjoyment of practising human geography to others. Yet Carl and Linda go about things in rather different ways, and it is instructive at the outset of our book to consider something of these differences.

For Carl, the approach is one which does very much involve packing his bags, leaving his home, locking the office door and heading out into the 'wilds' of regions probably at some distance from where he normally lives and works. In so doing he tries, for the most part, to forget about all the aspects of his life and work tied up with the home and the office: to forget about his social and institutional status as a respected member of the community and senior academic, to forget about his relationships with family, friends and colleagues, to forget about the books, reports and newspapers which he has been reading, and to forget about the concerns, troubles, opinions, politics, beliefs and the like which usually nag at him on a day-to-day basis. In addition, he is determined to leave with an open mind, with as few expectations as possible, and even with no specified questions to ask other than some highly generalized notions about what ought to interest geographers on their travels. Instead, his ambition is

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to become immersed in a whole new collection of peoples and places, and to spend time simply wandering around, gazing upon and participating in the scenes of unfamiliar environments and landscapes. He might occasionally be a little more proactive in chatting to people, perhaps farmers in the fields as he passes, and sometimes he might even count and measure things (counting up the numbers of houses in a settlement or fields of terraced cultivation, measuring the lengths of streets or the dimensions of fields). From this engagement, as Carl might himself say, the regions visited begin to 'get into his bones': he starts to develop a sense of what the peoples and places concerned 'are all about', a feel which is very much intuitive about how everything here 'fits together' (notably about how the aspects of the natural world shape the rhythms of its cultural counterpart or overlay), and an understanding of how the local environments work and of why the local landscapes end up looking like they do. The impression is almost of a 'magical' translation whereby, for Carl, meaningful geographical knowledge about these regions is conjured from simply being in the places concerned, formulated by him as the receptive human geographer from activities which are often no more active than a stroll, the drawing of a sketch, the taking of a photograph and the pencilling of a few notes. And the magical translation then continues, perhaps on return to his office, when Carl begins to convert his thoughts into written texts for the edification and education of others, and through which his particular feel for the given peoples and places is laid out either quite factually or more evocatively. Taken as whole, this is Carl's practising of human geography.

For Linda, the approach is arguably rather more complicated. She is much less certain about being able to manage a clean break from her everyday world as anchored in her

home, her office and her own social roles and responsibilities, nor from her prior academic reading, and nor from the accumulated baggage of assumptions, motivations, commitments and formalized intellectual ideas which swirl around in her head. Moreover, her *research* practice, her fieldwork, may not take her physically all that far away from the home or her office: she might end up researching peoples and places that are almost literally just next door, or at least located in the estates, shopping centres, business premises and so on, in a nearby city. The separation of everyday life from the *field*, the regions under study, which Carl can achieve, is not possible for Linda: indeed, it is also a separation about which she might be critical. And, whereas Carl aims to go into the field as a kind of 'blank sheet', Linda's approach depends on having a much more defined research agenda in advance, not one that entirely prefigures her findings but one that will incorporate definite research questions based around a number of key issues (perhaps connected to prior theoretical reading). Like Carl, though, she does wish to become deeply involved with particular peoples and particular places (which might be very specific sites such as 'the City', London's financial centre and its component buildings, rather than the much larger regions visited by Carl). She does want to get to know the goings-on in these micro-worlds, to become acquainted with many of the individuals found in these worlds and to try as hard as possible to tease out the actions, experiences and self-understandings of these individuals in the course of her research. The implication is that what she does *is* very much 'hard graft' research, since she has to be extremely proactive in deploying specific research tools – perhaps questionnaires, but more likely a mixture of documentary work, interviewing and participant observation (all of which will be covered in our book) – so as

to generate a wealth of *data* which will enable her to arrive at specific interpretations pertaining to the issues (or, to put in another way, at clear answers to her initial research questions). There is perhaps less the magical quality of Carl's approach, therefore, in that the labour allowing Linda to complete her research is much more evident and probably rather more bothersome, wearisome and even upsetting. The labour also continues to be apparent at the writing-up stage in that Linda reckons it vital to include sections explicitly on the *methodology* of the research, including notes on its pitfalls as well as its advantages, alongside debating at various points the extent to which someone like her – given just who she is, her social being and academic status – can ever genuinely find out about, let alone arrive at legitimate conclusions regarding, the issues, peoples and places under study. Taken as a whole, this is Linda's practising of human geography: it differs enormously from Carl's.

You should notice that several terms in the last paragraph are italicized, and Boxes 1.1–1.4 define and expand upon the meanings of these terms. They are crucial to the book, and

you should ensure that you understand them before proceeding. They are also crucial to our introduction, which will now continue by making Carl and Linda more real. We have talked about them so far as fictional characters through which we could illustrate different approaches to the practising of human geography, but we should also admit to having in mind two real human geographers, one past and one living, who are Carl Sauer and Linda McDowell. Carl Sauer (see Figure 1.1) was a geographer based for virtually all his career in the Berkeley Department in California, and his chief interests lay in the 'cultural history' of long-term inter-relationships between what he termed the 'natural landscape' and the 'cultural landscape', and in teasing out distinctive patternings of human culture as revealed in the mosaic of different material landscapes produced by different human activities (agricultural practices, settlement planning, religious propensities).¹ For the most part, Sauer disliked statements about both theory and methodology (although see Sauer, 1956), and he tended to regard the practising of human geography (and indeed of geography more

Box 1.1: Research

This term describes the overall process of investigation which is undertaken on particular objects, issues, problems and so on. To talk of someone conducting *research* in human geography is to say he or she is 'practising' or 'doing' his or her discipline, but it also carries with it the more specific sense of a sustained 'course of critical investigation' (POD, 1969: 703) designed to answer specific research questions through the deployment of appropriate methods. The ambition is to generate findings which can be evaluated to provide conclusions, and usually for the whole exercise to be reported to interested audiences both verbally and in writing. It contains, too, the suggestion that the exercise will be conducted in a manner critical of its own objectives, achievements and limitations, although we will argue that, by and large, human geographers have been insufficiently self-critical in this respect. The term 'research' is now very widely used in the discipline (e.g. Eyles, 1988a), and its relative absence from earlier geographical writing suggests that geographers prior to c. the 1950s and 1960s were less attuned to the notion of producing geographical knowledge through premeditated and structured procedures.

Box 1.2: Field

This deceptively simple term – the *field* – normally refers to the particular location where research is undertaken, which could be a named region, settlement, neighbourhood or even a building, although it can also reference what is sometimes called the ‘expanded field’ (as accessed in a few studies) comprising many different locations spread across the world (see also Driver, 2000a; Powell, 2002). We would include here, too, the libraries and archives wherein some researchers consult documentary sources, which means that we are also prepared to speak of historical geographers researching ‘in the field’. In addition, we suggest that the field should be taken to include not only the material attributes of a location, its topography, buildings, transport links and the like, but also the people occupying and utilizing these locations (who will often be the research subjects of a project). As such, the human geographer’s field is not only a ‘physical assignation’, but it is also a thoroughly ‘social terrain’ (Nast, 1994: 56–7), and some feminist geographers (e.g. Katz, 1994) have extended this reasoning to insist that a clean break should *not* be seen between the sites of active research and the other sites within the researcher’s world (a claim elaborated at the close of this chapter). This being said, we do wish to retain some notion of the field as where research is practically undertaken, but we fully agree that *fieldwork* must now be regarded as much more than just a matter of logistics. Instead, fieldwork should be thought of as encompassing the whole range of human encounters occurring within the uneven social terrain of the field, in which case it is marked as much by social ‘work’ as by the practicalities of getting there, setting up and travelling around.

Box 1.3: Data

‘Data are the materials from which academic work is built. As such they are ubiquitous. From passenger counts on transport systems to the constructs used in the most abstract discussion, data always have a place’ (Lindsay, 1997: 21). *Data* (in the plural) hence comprise numberless ‘bits’ of information which can be distilled from the world around us and, in this book, we tend to think of data, or perhaps ‘raw data’, as this chaos of information which we come by in our research projects (whether from the physical locations before us, the words and pictures of documentary sources, the statements made in interviews and recorded in transcripts, the observations and anecdotes penned in field diaries, or whatever). As we will argue, a process of *construction* necessarily occurs as these data are extracted from the field through active research, ready for a further process of *interpretation* designed to ‘make sense’ of these data (to substitute their ‘rawness’ with a more finished quality). Various kinds of distinction are made between different types of data (see also Chapter 7), the most common of which is that between *primary* and *secondary data*. The former is usually taken as data generated by the researcher, while the latter is usually taken as data generated by another person or agency, but we restate this particular distinction in terms of *self-constructed* and *preconstructed data* (see also the Preface and below). For us, therefore, primary data should be taken to include everything which forms a ‘primary’ input from the field into a researcher’s project (i.e. anything which he or she has not him- or herself yet interpreted). These data can include highly developed claims made in a government report or well-thought-out opinions expressed by an interviewee, in effect interpretations provided by others, but they remain primary data for us because the researcher has not yet begun to interpret them. We do not really operate with a notion of secondary data, therefore, except in so far as we might reserve this term for the interpretations of primary data contained in the scholarly writings of other academics.

Box 1.4: Methodology

'In the narrowest sense, [methodology is] the study or description of the methods or procedures used in some activity. The word is normally used in a wider sense to include a general investigation of the aims, concepts and principles of reasoning of some discipline' (Sloman, 1988: 525). On the one hand, then, there are the specific *methods* which a discipline such as human geography deploys in both the construction and the interpretation phases of research (including such specific techniques as measuring, interviewing, statistical testing and coding). On the other hand, there is the *methodology* of a discipline such as human geography that entails the broader reflections and debates concerning the overall 'principles of reasoning' which specify both how questions are to be posed (linking into the concepts of the discipline) and answers are to be determined (pertaining to how specific methods can be mobilized to provide findings which can meaningfully relate back to prior concepts). For some writers (including geographers: e.g. Schaefer, 1953; Harvey, 1969) there is little distinction between methodological discussion and what we might term 'philosophizing' about the basic spirit and purpose of disciplinary endeavour, but we prefer to regard methodology in the sense just noted, and hence as a *standing back* from the details of specific methods in order to see how they might 'fit together' and do the job required of them. In this sense, our book is most definitely a treatise on methodology.

generally) as something fairly obvious, coming 'naturally' to those who happened to be gifted in this respect. Linda McDowell (see Figure 1.2) is a geographer presently based at University College London, and her chief interests lie in the insights that feminist geography can bring to studies of 'gender divisions of labour' as these both influence the spatial structure of the city and enter into the day-to-day gendered routines of paid employment, in the latter connection paying specific attention to senior women employed in the London-based financial sector.² While McDowell has not written extensively about methodology, she has contributed significantly to the debates currently arising in this connection (see 1988; 1992a; 1999: ch. 9), and it is apparent that for her the practising of human geography is something necessitating considerable 'blood, sweat and tears'.

Our reasons for now fleshing out the human geographers who are 'Carl' Sauer and 'Linda' McDowell are various and, at one level, simply emerge from a wish to emphasize

that human geography is always produced by individual, flesh-and-blood nameable people whom you can see and perhaps meet. They could be you! But at another level, the differences between 'Carl' Sauer and 'Linda' McDowell are highly relevant to the broader arguments which we are developing in this introductory chapter. Indeed, in what follows we take Sauer and McDowell as exemplars of two very different ways of practising human geography which 'map' on to, respectively, older and newer versions of human geographical endeavour that can be identified within the history of the discipline. We must be circumspect about such a mapping: a Sauer-esque approach is still very much with us today, partly in the continuing works of regional synthesis and description carried out by many who regard this as the highest expression of the 'geographer's art' (Hart, 1982; Meinig, 1983; Lewis, 1985); while a McDowell-esque approach does have its historical antecedents in the use of certain clearly defined methods, such as questionnaires and interviews, long



From photograph by K. J. Pelzer, September, 1935.

Figure 1.1 Carl Ortwin Sauer

Source: From Leighley (1963: frontispiece)

before the current eruption of interest in putting such methods at the heart of human geographical research (see below). Yet, we believe that there *is* still some truth in the proposed mapping, and that a profound change *has* occurred in how human geographers envisage and proceed with their practising of academic research: a change which *can* be indexed by contrasting the likes of Sauer

and McDowell. By the same token, we wish to resist the impression that older approaches are bad whereas newer approaches are good, an impression readily conveyed by 'presentist' accounts which project a narrative of things steadily improving, progressing even, from a worse state before to a better state now. This means that we still find there is much of value in an older Sauer-esque orientation, in the



Figure 1.2 Linda McDowell

Source: Courtesy of Linda McDowell

ideal of suspending one's everyday and academic concerns in the process of becoming immersed in the worlds of very different peoples and places, and in no sense are we seeking to encourage an 'armchair geography' unaffected by the wonderment, hunches and ideas which strike the human geographer in the field. Yet it would be wrong to deny that we are more persuaded by McDowell than we are by Sauer, and that the basic purpose of our book is very much inspired by the likes of McDowell – complete with her insistence on the labour, messiness and myriad implications of actual research practices, all of which must be carefully planned, monitored, evaluated and perhaps openly reported – than it is by the more intuitive, magical, 'just let it happen' stance adopted by the likes of Sauer.

A thumbnail history of practising human geography

Leading from the above, and to frame what follows in our book, we now want to chart

something of the history of changes in the practising of human geography. It is only recently that serious attention has been paid to 'aspects of disciplinary practice that tend to be portrayed as mundane or localised, but that represent the very routines of *what we do*' (Lorimer and Spedding, 2002: 227, emphasis in original). Various authors are now claiming that we fail to appreciate much about our discipline without recognizing that 'geographical knowledge [is] constituted through a range of embodied practices – practices of travelling, dwelling, seeing, collecting, recording and narrating' (Driver, 2000a: 267). They further worry that many of our 'knowledge-producing activities', old and new, remain largely absent from how we represent our research, suggesting that 'our products of knowledge (our texts and even our emphases in conversations of recollection) could do more to make available this tension of the present tense of the world' (Dewsbury and Naylor, 2002: 254): meaning precisely the fraughtness of our actual practices as *we do them*. It is in the spirit of trying to make more visible such practices, and in so doing to assess them critically, that we now turn to our thumbnail history.

The history relayed here is not intended to be a comprehensive one, particularly since more historiographic research is required to clarify the details of how human geography (and also geography more generally) has been practised by different practitioners during different periods and in different places. (And note that active research is required to find out about this history, even if it be research whose 'field' is the archive and whose 'data' chiefly comprise the yellowing pages of writings, maps and diagrams produced by past adventurers, explorers and academic geographers: see Boxes 1.2 and 1.3.) Our history should also be read in conjunction with other works more specifically concerned with the history of geographical inquiry (Cloke et al., 1991;

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Livingstone, 1992; Peet, 1998). The history that we tell will be somewhat arbitrarily separated into three different, roughly chronological, phases: we focus chiefly on the first of these, for which Sauer is an exemplar in his preference for immersed observation; and then on the third of these, for which McDowell is an exemplar in her preference for what we will term reflexive practice based as much on listening as on looking. Reference will also be made to a 'middle' phase in which the practising of human geography did begin to be problematized, rather than regarded as intuitively given, and here we will mention the rise of a 'survey' impulse which ended up being hitched to a particular (and we will argue narrowly) scientific orientation. For each phase, we will outline the basic details of what the geographers involved were doing and arguing, before switching to offer some more evaluative comments about pluses and minuses that we perceive in their practices.

'Being there' and 'an eye for country'

Probably the most longstanding tradition within the practising of (human) geography, albeit one rarely considered all that explicitly, has been one which makes a virtue out of the geographer being personally present in a given place and thereby able to observe it directly through his or her own eyes. There are two interlocking dimensions to this tradition: the travelling to places within which the geographer can become immersed, surrounded by the sights, smells and other sensations of the places involved; and then the actual act of observation, the gazing upon these places and their many components, the peoples included.

Taking the first dimension of 'being there', few would dispute that the very origins of

something called 'geography' lie in the earliest travels which people from particular localities began to make to visit other places and peoples further away, and in how such people subsequently returned to convey their 'geographical' discoveries of these distant places and people to their own kinsfolk. H.F. Tozer (1897) duly suggests that the origins of 'ancient geography' must be found here, and he stresses the impetus for particular societies – notably Ancient Greece – to 'trace the increase of the knowledge which they possessed of various countries – of their outline and surface, their mountains and rivers, their products and commodities' (Tozer, 1897: 1–2). Although it is unlikely that the ancient geographers such as Strabo would have reported entirely on the basis of what they 'saw taking place before their eyes' (Tozer, 1897: 2), they probably aimed to witness as much as possible and then to base the rest of their work on the first-hand observations of other travellers. Indeed, it is probably not too fanciful to propose that a fairly direct lineage can be traced from these earliest geographers, many of whom must have been intrepid adventurers, through to the vaguely 'heroic' figure – almost a kind of 'Indiana Jones' character constantly journeying to distant lands – which may still be associated with the role of the geographer in the popular imagination.

Even in more academic circles such a notion is not entirely absent, most notably in the powerful motif of the geographer as 'explorer-scientist' which many (especially Stoddart, 1986; 1987) see as capturing the essence of academic geography's origins and continuing purpose. Leading from the 'Age of Reconnaissance' (c. 1400–1800) when voyages of discovery were attended by a gradual recovery of the lost navigational skills of the ancients, an academic 'geographical science' or 'scientific geography' began to take shape (Kimble, 1938; Bowen, 1981;

Livingstone, 1992: chs 2 and 3). By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European explorers such as Captain Cook were regularly taking scientists who talked of 'geography' on their excursions, while 'geographers' such as Humboldt were themselves mounting remarkable expeditions to the likes of Middle and South America. Through the endeavours of such individuals, specifically their attempts at accurate scientific description, measurement and specimen collection, the field-based production of geographical knowledge became more systematized, rigorous and the herald of a formally instituted academic discipline (taught in universities and boasting its own societies and journals: see Bowen, 1981; Capel, 1981; Stoddart, 1986: chs 2, 7–10; Livingstone, 1992: chs 4–7). Furthermore, organizations such as Britain's RGS (Royal Geographical Society) began to provide detailed guidance to explorer-geographers, offering more than just 'hints to travellers' in specifying procedures of description, measurement and mapping which would enable reliable geographical findings to be procured from their sojourns overseas (Driver, 1998; 2000b). Many controversies attached to this phase in geography's history, however, and considerable debate surrounded the extent to which geographical knowledge derived from the explorations could be trusted. Arguments duly raged both then and more recently over issues such as the value of writings by 'lady-travellers' (Domosh, 1991a; 1991b; Stoddart, 1991) and as to how to regard the bellicose activities of explorers such as Stanley who appeared to be more agents of empire (and European conquest) than exponents of geographical science (Driver, 1991; 1992; Godlewska and Smith, 1994). None the less, the undisputed core of this growing body of knowledge which was increasingly identified as academic geography remained the simple fact of 'being

there', of being present in the places, often far-flung, under examination.

Such a notion has continued to be central to academic geography, and to give one instance it is interesting to read Robert Platt's 1930s espousal of a 'field approach to regions' which wilfully set its face against those in North American geography who were then proposing some system to the practising of geography (see below). Sparked by a strong feeling that one should '[g]o to the field when the opportunity arises without worrying over lack of preparation' (Platt, 1935: 170), he recounted an expedition with students to the regions between James Bay and Lake Ontario in Canada which yielded impressionistic senses of these regions rather than guaranteed accurate findings. He thereby produced a species of regional geography organized as a narrative of the journey, reporting on what had been encountered en route as a window on phenomena such as forestry and trading patterns, and in so doing he offered an almost anecdotal evocation clearly spurred by personal experience of the sites and sights encountered:

There were no signs of human occupancy nor animals of respectable size. The air was bright and warm, and the scene pleasant except for one item which spoiled an otherwise agreeable environment: swarms of insects from which we had no means of escape, a few mosquitos and innumerable vicious flies. (1935: 153–4)

In this context it is appropriate to return to Sauer, since he too evidently supposed that 'being there' was essential for the good geographer, a claim that surfaced in an early piece when declaring that 'less trustworthy' are sources 'which have not been scrutinised geographically at first hand' (1924: 20). Here Sauer's favouring of field-based study, one predicated on being immersed in the peoples and places under study, was loudly exhorted, and precisely the same sentiments resurfaced

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over 30 years later when he stressed the need to be 'intimate' with regions being researched 'in the course of walking, seeing and exchange of observation' (1956: 296).

We will revisit the point about observation shortly, but for the moment it is revealing to add that Sauer echoed Platt in proposing a more informal engagement with places free from too many of the trappings of formal regional 'surveying' (see below):

To some, such see-what-you-can-find field-work is irritating and disorderly since one may not know beforehand all that one will find. The more energy goes into recording predetermined categories the less likelihood is there of exploration. I like to think of any young field group as on a journey of discovery, not as a surveying party. (1956: 296)

The ideal, he added, was to be in the field achieving 'a peripatetic form of Socratic dialogue about qualities of and in the landscape' (Sauer, 1956: 296). It is also

intriguing that, while noting the tradition whereby the geographer 'goes forth alone to far and strange places to become a participant observer of an unknown land and life' (1956: 296), he insisted as well on 'the dignity of study in the superficially familiar scene' (1924: 32) much closer to home. This line of reasoning, which found a wonderfully British inflection in the stress on student studies of 'field geography' and 'local geography' (see Box 1.5), has since led to the emphasis in many undergraduate geography courses on running field classes and field days within an immediate region or country (while overseas field trips may be seen as inheriting the more 'global' aspects of claims made by Sauer and his like). Another result has been papers considering the different forms of locomotion that geographers might employ when on active fieldwork, as in Salter's (1969) neglected note about the value of 'the bicycle as a field aid'!

Box 1.5: 'Field geography' and 'local geography'

In 1945 Charlotte Simpson published a paper entitled 'A venture in field geography', summarizing ten years of 'local geography' fieldwork undertaken by school children and undergraduate students in one particular Gloucestershire village. She stressed the role of 'observational work', based on a field walk taking in a 'viewpoint commanding a ... larger area' (1945: 35), and she outlined her sense of the discipline as 'an intensely practical subject, dealing with realities which can be experienced at first hand' (1945: 43). This paper indexed a whole tradition of running locally based fieldwork for younger geographers, and the mid-century British geographical literature is awash with notes and guides regarding fieldwork in schools.³ The establishment in 1943 of something called the Field Studies Council (Jensen, 1946) was important here in promoting the ability of 'reading a landscape' (Morgan, 1967: 145), initially publishing a series of countryside *Field Study Books* (Ennion, 1949–52) and from 1959 sponsoring a specialist journal called *Field Studies* (wherein geographers have often published papers). While someone like Coleman was seemingly obsessed by the need to make small children take long walks in the countryside, other writers had a clear sense akin to that of a Sauer or a Wooldridge about why such activity keyed into the core concerns of the discipline: 'the landscape is our subject matter, so we must look at it first hand as well as through the media of books, films and maps ... The need is simple and should not be expressed in quasi-philosophical terms' (E.M.Y., 1967: 228).

The second dimension mentioned above, to do with observation, is obviously tightly linked to the theme of 'being there'. It, too, has certainly been a feature of geographical inquiry down the ages, given that the whole stress on the witnessing of distant lands which became codified in the RGS's 'how to observe' field manuals (Driver, 1998; 2000b) hinges upon the expectation that the individuals involved – whether lay folk, professional voyagers or academic geographers – will be able to see, to look, to gaze upon the peoples and places visited. Most of the more methodological remarks which can be found in the earlier literature of academic geography hence concentrate on the observation issue, and it is telling to recall Platt's simple statement that, once in the field near James Bay, 'we opened our eyes and looked around' (1935: 153). Sauer is again a sure litmus for the prevailing wisdom: 'Geographic knowledge rests upon disciplined observation and it is a body of inferences drawn from classified and properly correlated observations ... We are concerned here simply with the relevance of the observations and the manner in which they are made' (1924: 19).

We will shortly review Sauer's reference to both classification and 'properly correlated observations', but at this point let us move to similar statements in his 1950s paper pivoting around the remark that the 'morphologic eye' allows the geographer to evince 'a spontaneous and critical attention to form and pattern' (1956: 290):

The geographic bent rests on seeing and thinking about what is in the landscape, what has technically been called the content of the earth's surface. By this we do not limit ourselves to what is visually conspicuous, but we do try to register both on detail and composition of scene, finding in it questions, confirmations, items or elements that are new and such as are missing. (1956: 289)

Underlying what I am trying to say is the conviction that geography is first of all knowledge gained by observation, that one orders by reflection and reinspection the things one has been looking at, and that from what one has experienced by intimate sight comes comparison and synthesis. (1956: 295–6)

Sauer also described the propensity for geographers 'to start by observing the near scenes' (1956: 296), before making the above-mentioned comment about going forth 'to become a participant observer of an unknown land and life' (1956: 296). More recently, and quoting one of the passages above from Sauer, C.L. Salter and P. Meserve have advocated geographers compiling 'life lists' of their accumulated field visits and the like, concluding in the process that:

To be a real geographer, one must observe. There is great power in observation. For a geographer, there are few skills more important in intellectual growth than the development of the ability to 'see what's there'. The act sounds so very innocent, yet being able to discern patterns on the horizons, what components make up the whole, significance in details, and whole from its parts, represents a critical geographic skill. (1991: 522–3)

We will also return to Salter and Meserve in a moment.

The British literature is full of similar claims advocating the centrality of observation to the geographer's craft, notably in the writing of Sidney Wooldridge, where he celebrates what he describes as 'an eye for country', which should be encouraged in geographers from an early age:

I submit that the object of field teaching, at least in the elementary stage, is to develop 'an eye for country' – ie. to build up the power to read a piece of country. This is distinct from, though plainly not unrelated to, 'map-reading'. The fundamental principle is that the ground not the map is the

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primary document, in the sense in which historians use that term. From this first principle I pass to a second, that the essence of training in geographical fieldwork is the comparison of the ground with the map, recognising that the latter, at its best, is a very partial and imperfect picture of the ground, leaving it as our chief stimulus to observe the wide range of phenomena which the map ignores or at which it barely hints. (1955: 78–9)

A class of young geographers, taken to a viewpoint in the field, should not be made to pore over a map ‘instead of concentrating on the work of looking and seeing’ (Wooldridge, 1955: 79), and the unequivocal message was that ‘eye and mind must ... be trained by fieldwork of laboratory intensity’ (1955: 82). In arguing this way, Wooldridge also insisted that it was vital for refined powers of observation to be inculcated in young geographers through fieldwork in the ‘little lands’ close to home, and that the transmission of core geographical skills ‘lies in the development of the laboratory spirit and the careful, indeed minute, study of limited areas’ (1955: 80). Such beliefs clearly urged the value of ‘being there’, and provided an even more forceful assertion than did Sauer of the need for observation-based fieldwork in the geographer’s immediate locality. These were dominant themes in mid-century British geography, informing the ‘field’ and ‘local geography’ initiatives which emerged in schools (see Box 1.5), and they also featured in the efforts of something called the ‘Le Play Society’, alongside its initially student offshoot called the ‘Geographical Field Group’, which sought to encourage British professional geographers in the conduct of rigorous fieldwork (Beaver, 1962; Wheeler, 1967). One ambition of the latter society was to get geographers out of libraries, to curtail the practice of many which involved little more than synthesizing facts about regions from second-hand library sources, and to foster in them an imitation of

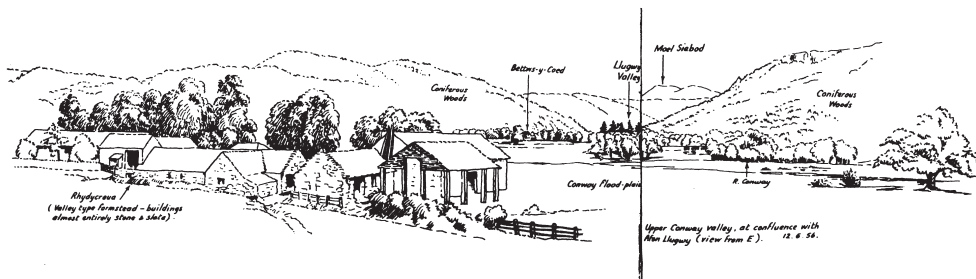
geologists and botanists in achieving ‘the highest qualities of observation and faithful recording in the field’ (Beaver, 1962: 226). Moreover, much was made of the role of observing landscapes in the field by an individual called G.E. Hutchings, who wished to blend into geography the skills of the ‘field naturalist’, and also sought to provide some rigour to geographers in the oft-promoted but rarely discussed art of landscape drawing (Hutchings, 1949; 1960; 1962: see Box 1.6).

Having laid out something of this highly pervasive emphasis on ‘being there’ and its associated ‘eye for country’, we should now acknowledge that we see many problems with such a stance on the practising of human geography (our criticisms would not necessarily apply to such a stance on the practising of physical geography). This being said, we should emphasize again that in no way would we wish to deny the importance of spending time in the field, immersed in the worlds of particular peoples and places, and neither would we want to underplay the importance of careful observation. Indeed, at various points in the book we will have much to say about such matters, albeit expanding on them in ways which Sauer, Wooldridge and the like probably would not recognize. There are significant criticisms to be made, however, in part to anticipate the alternative proposals of a more recent turn in the practising of human geography.

Thinking first about ‘being there’ and, while not wishing to commit us to staying in our armchairs, there is perhaps a certain arrogance in the assumptions of many older geographers about their supposed right to be able to travel widely, to visit wherever they wanted and to do their geographical research wherever they alighted. Such an arrogance also arises when the likes of Stoddart (1986) contemptuously dismiss the likes of Wooldridge for suggesting that much fieldwork should

Box 1.6: Field studies and landscape drawing

G.E. Hutchings (1962: 1) once declared that he sought 'to relieve the bookishness of education with practice in observation and exploring out of doors', thereby explaining his preference for combining geography and natural science through the medium of boots-on field study. He emphasized the importance of *landscape* as 'something that has to be viewed, whether scientifically or aesthetically', and insisted that 'it is very necessary for the geographer to acquire by training in the field what Prof. Wooldridge calls the "eye for country"' (1949: 34). And again, he stated that geography 'is a kind of learning arising in the first place from curiosity about the visible and tangible world, and requiring a capacity for looking beyond the superficial appearance of things' (1962: 2). Revealingly, given Hutchings's clear belief in geography as an observational pursuit, he published a book on landscape drawing which was directed particularly at the needs of geographers, in the course of which he gave technical hints about how to produce a sketch which 'is an honest picture of a piece of country, drawn with close attention to the form of its parts and the appearance of the various objects in it according to the effects of light and perspective' (1960: 1).



A redrawn field sketch of the Conway Valley and the Afon Llugwy

Source: Hutchings (1960: 18–19)

take place near to home, asserting instead that the wider world should be the geographer's province. For many geographers the belief that the world is *their* 'oyster' has never been questioned, and the possibility that large portions of it are really *somebody else's* world is not one that is often addressed. We are not so much talking here about the complication given by national borders or legal 'ownership' of land, although these can both be pertinent in some human geographical research, but, rather, we are talking about how the field – the specific places to be visited, including the human settlements, homes, workplaces and sites of recreation – is somewhere that we should perhaps be more hesitant to enter than

we have often been in the past. These are places where other people do live, striving to scrape a living and to make a life, and these people may pursue all sorts of activities which they would want to keep private from the prying intrusions of outsiders (and a host of considerations duly arise about the preservation of cultural difference, the guarding of spiritual and religious mores, the keeping secret of illegalities and so on). In addition, the places involved might be ones which hold deep meanings for those people who occupy and make use of them, and the presence there of outsiders, particularly intrusive ones taking photographs and writing notes, could be greatly resented.



Figure 1.3 White 'explorer-geographers' being carried across a river by black 'native' bearers

Source: From Brice and Bain (no date, c. 1918: 34)

Objections on these counts to the geographer as intrusive alien are increasingly coming from development geographers, persuaded in part by the criticism that geographers working in Africa, Asia, South America and elsewhere effectively reproduce the same structural relationship with 'native' peoples as had arisen in the expeditions of the colonial explorer-geographers from earlier centuries: a relationship in which power, influence and assumptions of superiority lie with the white geographers appropriating knowledge, labour and skills from the peoples of colour in these places (e.g. Sidaway, 1992; Madge, 1993; Powell, 2002). The relationship in question is neatly illustrated in Figure 1.3, which shows a white explorer-geographer, perhaps Stanley, being carried across a river on the shoulders of black bearers. We guess that nothing like this happens in the research of today's development geographers, but is the presence of (say) Anglo-American researchers in the places of their black research subjects so completely free of all the inequalities and embedded assumptions which are coded into this illustration?

The seeming innocence of just 'being there' can also be questioned in situations where geographers are researching closer to home, since the activity of strolling into (say) a Cornish fishing village or an Alpine skiing resort to commence the work of immersed observation is

surely one that many people in these places – whether local villagers or people on holiday – might regard as an unwanted imposition. Moreover, while some human geographers have now started to study marginal groupings such as ethnic minorities, children and the elderly, 'Gypsies' and other travellers and so on, it is certainly not obvious that the researcher arriving in the places of such groupings is a good thing for them. It does comprise an intrusion and an imposition, one that may be deeply disturbing to the individuals and families involved, and one which could have dire consequences if researchers made public certain information about their precise locations, movements and place-related activities (a concern constantly expressed by David Sibley in his research on travellers: 1981a; 1985). We realize that human geographers will want to continue doing engaged work that requires them to be present in the situations of other peoples and places, and we fully support this important aspect of research, but we note too that – following the examples of critical development geographers, McDowell, Sibley and many others – the apparent rightness of such research practice can no longer be straightforwardly assumed. Rather, the picture must become one of researchers negotiating *access* to peoples and their places, both by formally liaising with the peoples concerned and by thinking much

more carefully than hitherto about the politics of 'being there' as bound up with the differing origins, backgrounds, attributes and social standings of the human geographer relative to these peoples and places. We will return to such access issues again in this chapter, and then again later in the book.

Turning now to the issue of 'an eye for country', it should be explained that there is now a sustained critique of the pervasive 'ocularcentricism' of much conventional geographical inquiry. Acknowledging this critique forces a thorough-going reappraisal of the obsessive advocacy of observation which figures in many of the statements quoted above. There are various strands of this critique, but all of them converge on what is entailed in geographers setting themselves up as privileged observers able to gaze upon – and, more dubiously, to gaze *down* upon – peoples and places laid out before their eyes like so many exhibition entries. Several historians of the discipline have begun to examine the observational technologies which geographers have deployed, highlighting the extent to which visual images of landscapes are themselves not so much innocent factual records as fabricated or 'staged' representations. David Livingstone (1992: 130–3) assesses the 'artistic vision' which served to compose many of the observations taken by eighteenth-century explorer-geographers, discussing the tensions which existed for both scientific illustrators on the voyages and engravers back in Europe when trying to balance the need for a faithful (empirical) rendition with the prevailing aesthetic tastes of the age:

Banks always felt a tension between the call of taste and that of pictorial reproduction, and so his painters did devote some of their energies to romantic topics like grottoes, exotic rituals and so on because these suited the then fashionable rococo style. Moreover, even when accurate depictions of native peoples ... were provided, it just was

very hard to bring an objective account of them before the British public. Engravers *would* dress up the original paintings to keep them in line with their own philosophical predilections. (1992: 131, emphasis in original)

Tackling the role of photography in the 'imaginative geography' of the British Empire, and as linked to the production of geographical knowledge by nineteenth-century British explorer-geographers (many of whom were associated with the RGS), James Ryan (1997: 17) exposes the limits to the Victorian (and still prevailing) assumption that photography comprises 'a mechanical means of allowing nature to copy herself with total accuracy and intricate exactitude'. Alternatively, Ryan finds a suite of cultural constructions running throughout the photographic observations of 'distant places' throughout this period, teasing out the 'symbolic codes' which structured the composing and the framing of the images, and also hinting at the effects of these images on their audiences:

Through various rhetorical and pictorial devices, from ideas of the picturesque to schemes of scientific classification, and different visual themes, from landscape to 'racial types', photographers represented the imaginative geographies of Empire. Indeed, as a practice, photography did more than merely familiarise Victorians with foreign views: it enabled them symbolically to travel through, explore and even possess those spaces. (1997: 214)

The reference here to 'possessing' spaces through observation will be recalled in a moment, and it also suggests a key claim that might be pursued in critical accounts of what is entailed in the much more recent use by geographers of technologies such as remote sensing (with its self-evident links to military and commercial uses of such technologies).

A second but related dimension of the critique centres on the more metaphorical sense

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in which many geographers have configured the world as an 'exhibition' for them to wander around, as it were, gazing upon the exhibits (the diverse collections of peoples and places there displayed) and making judgements about them. Indeed, Derek Gregory (1994; see also Mitchell, 1989) borrows the phrase 'world-as-exhibition' when tracing this tendency through different phases and approaches to geographical study, relating it as well to the 'cartographic' impulse which has led many geographers to conceive of themselves flying over landscapes of nature and society laid out below them. Revealingly, some writers have even drawn connections here to the strangely detached sensation which arises when looking down from an aeroplane, and (more worryingly) from the basket of a World War One balloon or the cockpit of a World War Two bomber (Bayliss-Smith and Owens, 1990). Gillian Rose (1993b; 1995), meanwhile, has developed a powerful argument that this version of an academic gaze reflects a distinctively 'masculinist' way of looking at the world, one predicated on an assumed mastery which allows the viewer to see into all corners of the world – all of which are reckoned to be available and amenable to the gaze, transparent to the piercing intellectual eye – and one which also carries with it an inherent desire to possess, to subdue, the phenomena under the gaze. Rose's argument is difficult, hinging on a combining of psychoanalytic ideas with a historical account of how male intellectuals have effectively constructed science (geography included) in their own (presumed) self-image. More simply, though, she outlines the masculinist propensities of fieldwork: both the heroic encounter of rugged individuals with a challenging field which is coded into the 'being there' approach, notably of someone like Stoddart (1986), and the associated figure of the male researcher observing, describing,

measuring and thereby capturing this field for himself (see also Sparke, 1996; Powell, 2002: esp. 263).

Central to the objections raised by Gregory, Rose and others to the prominence of observation is the suggestion that the faculty of sight should not be accorded such a master status in geographical work, whether in actual practices or in how we conceptualize the wider projects of the discipline. One implication is that other senses through which the world is knowable by us, notably hearing and more particularly still the practice of listening closely to what people say, should be brought more fully into our practice as *human* geographers (see also Rodaway, 1994).⁴ A second implication is that we should resist the too glib deployment of terms saturated with assumptions about observation and sight in our thinking about the discipline, and in the process to resist a general orientation which conceives of the discipline as trying to make transparently visible all facets of the subject-matters under study. This is not the occasion to expand further upon such lines of criticism, nor upon their implications, although we hope that readers will be able to appreciate how the third approach to practising human geography described below does take them on board.

Surveys and scientific detachment

It should not be thought that the practising of human geography prior to recent years has only been about immersed observation, however, and it is actually the case that efforts to provide a more systematic basis for geographical research – one going beyond intuitive fieldwork to develop a definite technique of 'survey' – *did* figure in the history of the discipline earlier in the century. Sauer himself was instrumental in starting this ball rolling

with his 1924 paper (see also Jones and Sauer, 1915) which was entitled 'The survey method in geography and its objectives', in the course of which he urged geographers to develop regimented and replicable methods of geographical inquiry. The similarities between this paper and his later writings notwithstanding, there are also key differences which reflect the enthusiasm of the younger Sauer for developing systematic principles of areally based 'geographic survey' incorporating not

only *qualitative* materials but also *quantitative* information, the latter being derived from both 'statistical tables of state and national agencies' (Sauer, 1924: 20) and 'local statistical archives' (1924: 30). (See Box 1.7 for a preliminary note on the distinction between qualitative and quantitative data: this distinction, and its limitations, will be explored further in later chapters, especially Chapter 8.) It is perhaps surprising to hear the younger Sauer's own words in this regard:

Box 1.7: Qualitative and quantitative

This distinction has become rather sedimented in the thinking of many geographers, perhaps to the point where it becomes unhelpful and overloaded with misunderstanding and prejudice (see Philo et al., 1998; see also Demeritt and Dyer, 2002). *Qualitative data* are data that reveal the 'qualities' of certain phenomena, events and aspects of the world under study, chiefly through the medium of verbal descriptions which try to convey in words what are the characteristics of those data. These can be the words of the researcher, describing a given people and place in his or her field diary, or they can be the words found in a planning document, a historical report, an interview transcript or whatever (in which case the words are in effect themselves the qualitative data). Sometimes these data can be visual, as in the appearance of a landscape observed in the field (see Box 1.6), or as in paintings, photographs, videos and films. *Quantitative data* are data that express the 'quantities' of those phenomena, events and aspects of the world amenable to being counted, measured and thereby given numerical values, and the suggestion is that things which are so amenable will tend to be ones which are immediately tangible, distinguishable and hence readily counted (1, 2, 3, ...) or measured (an area of 200 m²; a population of 20 000 people live there; a per capita earning of £100 000). It should be underlined that such counts and measurements are still only descriptions of the things concerned, albeit descriptions which are arguably more accurate and certain than are qualitative attributions (chiefly because they allow a common standard of comparing different items of data, and also the possibility of repeating this form of describing data: i.e. other researchers would count the same number of things or measure the same areas, population levels, per capita incomes, etc.). The use of quantitative data is hence commonly reckoned to be more *objective* (allowing researchers to deal with data in an accurate, certain and therefore unbiased manner), while qualitative data are commonly reckoned to be more *subjective* (leaving researchers prone to injecting too much of their own 'biases' in their dealings with data). As should be evident from much of this chapter, and of the rest of the book, we do not agree with such a conclusion because it forgets about the countless other issues which militate against the possibility of complete objectivity (which means that being quantitative is no convincing guarantee of objectivity).

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The purpose ... is not to make fieldwork mechanical, but to increase its precision. The choice of things to be observed must remain a matter of individual judgement as to the significant relationship between area and population. Out of such field measurements will come the ... ideal of statistical coefficients. From them the geographer will determine ultimately the extent to which the theory of mathematical correlation is to be introduced into geography. (1924: 31)

It is telling that Sauer linked this version of field survey to the possibility of a more statistically minded geography, one which by the 1960s was regarded as the province of a fully scientific discipline, and we will return to this linkage shortly. The thrust of his reasoning here was echoed and extended a year later in D.H. Davis's (1926: esp. 102–3) rejection of 'superficial observations' when calling instead for geographers to evolve a 'mechanical quality' to their 'system of recording essential data accurately', one suitable for 'establishing correlations', which would then lead 'geography ... to be entitled to rank as a science'. Similar discussions of survey as a scientific methodology for geographers can be found elsewhere in the early- to mid-century literature, and it was these discussions, with their thinly veiled criticism of those who favoured a more impressionistic field style, that prompted both Platt's (1935) reactions and certain reservations from the older Sauer (1956), as already mentioned.

More practically, several papers (e.g. Jones, 1931; 1934) appeared in the North American literature which began to itemize the kinds of things which needed to be recorded in a comprehensive field-based geographical survey, the forms and functions of land uses to be mapped, as well as specifying the specific survey methods which might be employed to create this record (field walks and drive-bys, complete with their counting and mapping of phenomena, along with collecting statistical data from 'local depositories'). A review of 'field techniques' available for use by geographers in

their surveys of areal units was provided by C.M. Davis (1954), and a feel for the ground covered by this remarkably thorough early statement of survey methodology can be gained from these claims in the paper's opening paragraph:

There are four sources of factual information: 1) documents such as maps, ground photographs, statistics and written materials; 2) air photographs; 3) direct observation; and 4) interviews with informants. And there are four ways of analysing factual information for the purpose of identifying and measuring areal, functional or causal relations, each requiring the use of symbols: 1) analysis by expository methods, using word symbols; 2) analysis by statistical methods, using mathematical symbols; 3) analysis by cartographic methods, using map symbols; and 4) analysis by photo-interpretation methods, using photo-interpretation keys. (1954: 497)

Davis began to suggest a distinction between the data to be collected (*constructed* in our terms: see below) and the procedures through which those data can be analysed (*interpreted* in our terms), and he also indicated that the data collected could be qualitative or quantitative, with implications for the sorts of analytical techniques to be deployed on these data from the field. Equivalent practical statements also appeared in the British literature, many of which effectively hovered between the celebration of an unsystematized 'being there' stance and providing systematic guidance about what should be found out in locally based field surveys (see Box 1.5). The emerging 'field studies' movement which hooked into academic geography in various ways (e.g. Hutchings, 1962; Morgan, 1967; Yates and Robertson, 1968) articulated a vision not far from the survey orientation of some North American geographers, and the Geographical Field Group (descended from the Le Play Society) was expressly committed to ensuring that '[o]bservation, direct inquiry and documentation, including statistical

material, all contribute to the data-collecting process' (Edwards, 1970: 314; and note that this group conducted a 'series of "regional survey" type excursions' described in Wheeler, 1967: 188). In an edited collection on the geography of Greater London, A.E. Smailes described 'urban survey' as the detailed recording of information about town sites from field-based observation ('reconnaissance survey') gleaned from 'traversing the streets' (1964: 221). Additionally, in a manoeuvre paralleling the survey cataloguing recommended somewhat earlier in North America by Wellington Jones (1931; 1934), Smailes proposed a specific 'urban survey notation' which produced a pseudo-quantitative form of data logging ready, presumably, for more sophisticated statistical analysis (see Figure 1.4). Whatever the precise details of the survey systems developed by these scholars, however, what we would immediately emphasize is their list-like, box-filling, counting and mapping ambitions: ones reflecting the primary ambition of the geographers concerned to accumulate data through which they could characterize the areas and sub-areas under study.

It is true that there were some qualitative elements here, as in the significance occasionally placed on talking to field 'informants' (see Chapter 5), but the basic trajectory of the survey approach was none the less towards a self-proclaimed scientific orientation. The prime ambition was to conduct systematic surveys which would produce comprehensive and reliable quantitative data representative of areal units (whether these be regions as large say, the Paris Basin or as small as, say, Glasgow's West End). There was also the beginning of suggestions about being able to conduct statistical analyses on these quantitative data, perhaps by using standard statistical tests to establish the strength of correlations between different sets of data (i.e. to show that certain areas are marked by high values

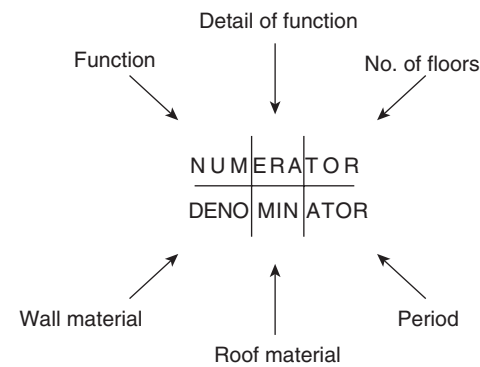


Figure 1.4 A.E. Smailes's pseudo-scientific 'urban survey' notation

Source: From Smailes (1964: Figure 41, 204)

on different variables, say income levels, occupancy rates and car ownership). We have already noted D.H. Davis's (1926) explicit linking of such surveys to a version of geography which could claim the name of 'science', while James Anderson (1961) played up the role of survey work in the context of land-use classifications as enhanced by 'statistical probability sampling procedures' and the use of computers. In such a vision survey work would contribute to providing the data on spatial patterns, chiefly data which might then be deployed in the process known as 'regionalization', the supposedly scientific delimitation of regions or areas fundamentally different from one another, and then in a process of classifying different types of regions according to certain distinctive clusters of attributes (e.g. Philbrick, 1957; Grigg, 1965; 1967; see also Chapter 7).

There is a complicated story to tell in this regard, but at bottom a continuity can be detected from the quantitative impulse in this survey work and the rise of geography as spatial science from the 1950s onwards (see Livingstone, 1992: chs 8 and 9; see also Barnes, 2001a). Spatial science, as is well known, entailed a fusion of quantitative techniques

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with a form of locational analysis aiming to explicate the basic 'spatial laws' governing the organization of phenomena (human behaviour and productions included) across the earth's surface.⁵ In Chapter 8 we say much more about enumeration in geography, but for the moment it is sufficient to emphasize the extent to which quantification became the favoured way of going about things in geography as spatial science, linked into a particular model of how statistical tests (and then more formalized mathematical modelling) could all aid in the explanation of revealed spatial patterns (and see also Chapter 9).

All manner of claims were made for the superior merits of spatial science, complete with its quantitative sophistication, and at the nub of such claims was the assertion that a properly 'scientific' approach to research was one which overcame the potential 'bias' of researchers in ensuring the completely detached (and hence certain, accurate and trustworthy) cast of the research undertaken. In particular, the use of numerical values as measures of quantity, distance, position and the like was reckoned to provide an *objective* representation of what was actually happening in the 'real world', in contradistinction to the much less reliable data obtained through the *subjective* understandings integral to both the intuitive stance of a Sauer or the conversational elements of some survey work. (See Box 1.7 for a summary of the tangled debates about objectivity and subjectivity.) Such were the assumed advantages of a spatial-scientific practising of human geography, one which grew out of the above-mentioned survey tradition, but which came to embrace a much wider set of procedural, technical and explanatory goals. As a coda, and anticipating some of our arguments in Chapters 7 and 8, this version of human geography continues today, notably in the development and application of geographical information systems (GIS) and various forms of geocomputation.

Arguably, there is a level of sophistication about these more recent approaches to quantitative geography that was absent in the early days of spatial science.

Having laid out something of this scientific and survey approach to practising human geography, we should acknowledge that here too we see many drawbacks with what was being proposed. Many of these drawbacks were bound up with the overall philosophical difficulties attaching to spatial science, particularly as have been rehearsed through exposing the somewhat narrow 'positivist' philosophical assumptions which can be said – certainly in retrospect (Gregory, D., 1978a; Hill, 1981; Barnes, 2001a; 2001b) – to have framed this scientific turn within the discipline. At various points in our book we will engage with these problems, demonstrating the ways in which they arguably hamper the practising of human geography, although – as with the 'being there' and 'eye for country' stances – we are not denying that some aspects of the scientific and quantitative turns still have much to offer in the doing of human geography (and in a similar vein, see Sayer, 1984; Philo et al., 1998). None the less, we are concerned at the extent to which methodological treatises in human geography continue to be dominated by an exposition of spatial-scientific techniques (e.g. Lindsay, 1997; Robinson, 1998): a reduction of methodology to matters of technique.⁶ Similarly, we are concerned about a rather narrow sense of what 'geographical enumeration' can entail which fails to look much beyond standard parametric tests. Such considerations remain pertinent to the practising of human geography, to be sure, but what concerns us is the lack of serious engagement with more conceptual questions about the limitations of what a self-professed scientific and quantitative human geography can and cannot achieve. Such questions are raised throughout this

book, even if not always being conveniently labelled as such (to reiterate: Chapters 7–9 all debate these questions in one way or another).

What we will specifically underline now, since it is so relevant to the third phase in the history being recounted, is that we are deeply suspicious of the claims about the detachment of the researcher which are celebrated in the literatures of scientific, quantitative and survey-based human geography. We are perturbed by the determined erasure of the 'I', the researching individual or group, which serves (in our minds) only to occlude the realities of the active research progress through which flesh-and-blood geographers such as 'Carl' and 'Linda' actually get their feet, hearts and minds muddled in the places and people under study. Spatial science, along with both its antecedents and its derivatives, thus closes off the possibility of debating the practising of human geography in the fashion of this book. As just remarked, spatial scientists tend to reduce methodology to technique, being bothered about the correct running of an appropriate statistical test but less about anything entailed in the deriving of the data on which the test is conducted (unless relevant to deciding on which particular test is suitable), nor about anything following conceptually, politically, ethically or otherwise from choosing to tackle the data statistically rather than in some other way. There is a further and possibly simpler objection to raise in relation to the appearance of spatial science, moreover, in that it evidently led many human geographers to lose interest in field-based *primary* data, given that they rapidly became far more interested in the enticing array of statistical-mathematical techniques available (and being refined) for analysing *secondary* data (see Box 1.3). As Robert Rundstrom and Martin Kenzer neatly put it:

Although quantitative human geographers were primarily concerned with abstract theory development [specifying the spatial laws of

location theory], many of the early spatial analysis papers ... were based on fieldwork. The pattern changed by the middle of the 1970s. Continuing progress in spatial analysis was marked by theoretical developments relying on pre-existing data. Primary data became superfluous. Ackerman (1965) already considered fieldwork a mere chore, only occasionally necessary to validate the analytic, theoretical work of spatial science. James and Mather (1977) noted that some human geographers questioned whether fieldwork was still a necessary part of the discipline. (1989: 296)

Instead of going out into the field to collect data, many spatial-scientific human geographers started to spend the bulk of their time sitting in their offices and laboratories, punching in data found in library sources (e.g. Census surveys), reworking their own older data or even inventing data sets, as a prelude to the *real* work (for them) of using computer facilities to effect statistical-mathematical interrogations, simulations and model-building. To put it another way, 'economic geography [and human geography more widely] moved from a field-based, craft form of inquiry to a desk-bound technical one in which places were often analysed from afar' (Barnes, 2001b: 553). The practising dimension of their inquiries therefore collapsed into the techniques, reinforcing our previous argument, with a loss of concern for nuances of data, the composition of the field or the overall research process. In the terms of this book (see the Preface), this meant a loss of interest in the *construction* of data in preference for focusing, albeit very narrowly, on the *interpretation* of (quantitative) data. It is an exaggeration, but perhaps not too great a one, to state that this version of human geographical inquiry ceased to practise human geography except in the most minimal of senses. Neither a Sauer nor a McDowell would find much here to satisfy them, and the same is probably true of many human geographers today who continue to use numerical data and sophisticated

statistical-mathematical procedures but always with an alertness to the origins, meanings and limits of the numbers and their manipulation (e.g. Dorling, 1998).

'Being reflexive' and 'listening to voices'

From about 1970 onwards, many human geographers, unhappy about both older approaches to the discipline and the spatial-scientific version, began to seek for new possibilities. There were numerous bases to their quarrel with how human geography was being practised at the time, centring chiefly on the limited conception of how human beings entered into the 'making' of their own worlds, but also on the almost complete absence of what might be termed a 'political' vision of why research was undertaken in the first place (who was it supposed to benefit and why?). While somewhat oversimplifying the picture, it can be argued that these twin objections to previous approaches, and most especially to spatial science, fed into two rather different alternative varieties of human geography – to be referred to here respectively as 'humanistic geography' and 'radical geography' (see Cloke et al., 1991; Peet, 1998) – which both demanded new ways of practising human geography. Indeed, their emergence and subsequent elaboration, particularly when mixed in with the insights from 'feminist geography' from the mid-1980s onwards, have effectively called forward a sensibility almost wholly unheard of before in the discipline. In short, this sensibility can be described as 'being reflexive', which means that human geographers are now called upon to reflect much more explicitly upon their *own* research endeavours than hitherto, giving careful consideration to precisely what it is that they are doing in their own projects: the conceptual, practical, political and ethical implications arising for these projects, for themselves, for

the people and places under study, and perhaps even for society more generally.

We would argue that, while not often given this credit, humanistic geography was decisive in prompting the developments leading to the new sensibility just mentioned. Humanistic geography was an umbrella term which arose in the 1970s (esp. Entrikin, 1976; Tuan, 1976a; Ley and Samuels, 1978) to denote a range of perspectives highly critical of how most human geographers, but most obviously spatial scientists, tended to conceptualize human beings. Extending an earlier 'behavioural' turn in the discipline and drawing upon various so-called 'philosophies of meaning' (Ley, 1981a; for summary details, see Cloke et al., 1991: ch. 3), the humanistic geographers complained bitterly about the 'pallid' view of human beings present in existing scholarship (Ley, 1980): one that portrayed human beings as little more than mere objects or at best robots with no interior sense of themselves, no intentions, no hopes or fears and no creative role to play in shaping their surroundings. Instead, so they insisted, the discipline needed to be dramatically reformed around a very different conception of humanity, a vision which recognized humans in all their flawed ambiguities as experiencing, perceiving, feeling, thinking and acting beings. Such a vision sought to enlarge the 'space' for human beings within the discipline, to grant them a measure of dignity, to 'people' human geography; in fact, to foster a new emphasis on the *human* part of human geography. The intellectual terrain here was uneven, but one over-riding outcome leading from this expanded conception of the human being was the need to find ways of accessing the human qualities, the sheer humanness, now reckoned to be central to disciplinary concerns. Spurred by a changed appreciation of what is important in the world under study – people and their inner lives, rather than spatial patterns and supposed spatial laws – the

humanistic geographers had to consider fresh research practices, novel stances before their subject-matters and unfamiliar methods for getting close to people and their everyday apprehensions, understandings, routines and activities. It meant starting to use methods which provided some structure to the tasks of meeting with people, perhaps interacting with them on an everyday basis, perhaps talking with them in depth and certainly 'listening to their voices'. It meant rediscovering the questioning and interviewing techniques of the earlier survey tradition but, more significantly, it meant bringing into human geographical research the 'ethnographic' practices of in-depth interviewing, participant observation and the excavation of meaning which were much more the province of other academics such as anthropologists and sociologists. It meant returning to a measure of immersed observation in the vein of Sauer, but it also meant a much more sustained encounter with the peoples in the places visited. It required the thoroughly involved people-centred fieldwork which led the likes of John Eyles (1985), Michael Godkin (1980) and Graham Rowles (1978a; 1978b; 1980) to spend days, weeks and months in the company of individuals, witnessing the grain of their lived worlds, discussing with them the meanings attached to places, environments and landscapes comprising the spatial contexts of these small worlds.

A key figure in all this was undoubtedly David Ley, whose famous exploration of inner-city Philadelphia, including an attempt to recover the existential meanings of place and 'turf' held by black street gangs, blended the ideas of a humanistic geographer, the interests of a social geographer and the practices of an 'urban ethnographer' (Ley, 1974). Following in part the example of ethnographers associated with the Chicago School of urban sociology (Jackson, 1985), but growing as well from his response to 'the relentless barrage

of everyday pressures in the inner city' (Ley, 1988: 132), Ley created his own distinctive version of what he later came to term 'interpret(at)ive social research':

With limited experience to fall back on, aside from the intuition gained from a British field tradition [presumably Wooldridge's 'eye for country'] and knowledge derived from a number of ethnographies, devising a method was in part a matter of learning on the job. The principal method was participant observation. The period from January to July was set out as the length of continuous residence in the neighbourhood ... It is essential to establish a systematic procedure for recording field data in any ethnographic research, and my practice was to write up field notes each evening, ranging in size from a paragraph to (occasionally) 1000 words [see also Chapter 6]. These notes were records of impressions, events and conversations, sometimes reconstructed from brief phrases or sentences scribbled down during the course of the day. (1988: 130)

The 'unstructured, everyday encounters' which generated this data were then supplemented with more formal face-to-face 'questionnaire interviews', some taping of public meetings and some reading of 'agency data and documents from police, planning and school board authorities', as well as extensive field observation on phenomena such as 'graffiti, vandalised cars or abandoned properties' (Ley, 1988: 130–1). The result was an eclectic mix of data sources and methods of both data collection (*construction*) and analysis (*interpretation*), containing both quantitative and qualitative moments, and it broke new ground in creating a model for practising human geography which has since been widely emulated. The majority of later researchers would probably not call themselves humanistic geographers, preferring instead labels such as social or cultural geographer (see Jackson and Smith, 1984, or the various studies reported in Jackson, 1989; Anderson and Gale, 1992), but the basic procedures deployed by them did

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arrive in the discipline with the humanistic experiments of someone like Ley (and note that participant observation was explicitly claimed as a prime method for humanistic geography by Smith, S.J., 1981; 1984; see also Jackson, 1983). It might be added that the version of inquiry being progressively refined in this vein has since also been termed 'interpretative geography' (Eyles, 1988b) or 'interpretative human geography' (Smith, D.M., 1988b), and several fine examples of practice have been collected together in books edited by John Eyles and David Smith (1988) and more recently by Melanie Limb and Claire Dwyer (2001).

Ley has remarked that '[e]thical issues are far more conspicuous in ethnographic research because of the close relationship between the researcher and the community' (1988: 132), thereby indicating that the new forms of research initiated by humanistic geography have forced into the open questions about the researcher's personal involvement with a project, people and place. What are the 'biases' of the researcher? How do these influence how he or she conducts the research, how he or she represents the peoples and places studied in a write-up, and the informal 'contract' which he or she strikes up with a community about what is done, said and finally given back? All these questions start to concern the researcher in a manner which had never been the case for previous generations of geographers, and certainly not for spatial scientists, and the 'ethics and values' of doing geography thus become a subject for debate as never before (Mitchell and Draper, 1983a; 1983b). On an operational level, an extreme instance is reported in Rowles's (1978b: esp. 179) study of the geographical experiences of elderly people, and entailed him sitting at the deathbed of one of his aged respondents, Stan. Here, as the only 'friend' whom Stan had left in the world, the only person remaining who cared enough to sit in

that hospital room, Rowles found himself urging Stan not to die because the research was still incomplete. But he hated himself for thinking in this way: was this all that it had been about, getting the research done, and how hollow, how intrusive but meaningless had been his 'befriending' of Stan for the purposes of academic research? The ethics – the turmoil, stress and guilt – attendant upon such a moment were light-years away from anything experienced by, say, spatial scientists working on impersonal numerical data sets at the computer terminal. This is not to suggest that there are any simple guidelines for how researchers should pick their way through the ethical minefield which can confront them in research of this character. As Ley (1988: 133) acknowledges, '[t]here are no set pieces in answering those questions, and indeed answers will vary according to the circumstances of the community', but what can be insisted is that in specific studies 'the questions must be asked and answered in good faith'. This is not to demand that researchers always put down in writing their thoughts, worries and responses on this count, but it is to propose that they should be able to offer some relevant reflections if ever challenged to do so.

The researcher's presence as an 'I', a creative and reflexive figure in the research process who is not erased as a non-issue (as might a Sauer) or cloaked behind a veil of claimed objectivity (as might a spatial scientist), is therefore as much a part of this approach to human geography as are theories, data, methods and so on. On the still deeper level of the researcher's underlying interests, convictions and motivations, furthermore, the appearance of humanistic geography was also crucial in foregrounding such values in a fashion rarely if ever seen before in the discipline. To put things another way, humanistic geography prompted attention not just to the subjectivity of the researched but also to the subjectivity of the researcher. Writing in a determinedly

scientific manifesto for human geography, Ronald Abler et al. (1971: 24) had declared that the scientific 'way of life' should be 'total', and that it should be completely divorced from how scientists might 'let their hair down emotionally and theologically ... during their off hours'. The latter aspects of their lives, of who they are and of what they feel or believe, should hence be roped off from their efforts as professional human geographers.

But writing only three years later, Anne Buttimer, a humanistic geographer who was also then in religious orders, advocated something entirely different when insisting that such a compartmentalization of the human geographer's personal and professional faces is mischievous because it just cannot happen, since personal values can *never* be systematically erased from the framing, conduct and write-up of research. And for Buttimer such an erasure should never be attempted anyway, being unnecessarily restrictive because it denies many of the well-springs of genuine human concern and creativity, and also depriving us of crucial grounds for sensible ethical judgement. Science alone cannot provide those grounds, so she argued, and the dangers of a science without ethics now become increasingly obvious. Her alternative proposal was quite clear:

Each reader [each human geographer] should endeavour to explore the values which guide/influence his [or her] mode of being in the world, for it is the contention of this paper that one's geography cannot be considered a separate domain of one's life but is influenced by many personal, cultural and political 'values' surrounding that work. (1974: 5)

Buttimer duly reflected upon many of the values which shaped her own geography, pointing out that they were 'strongly influenced by Christian, and especially existential thought' (1974: 5), and she thereby countered Abler et al.'s (1971: 24) pronouncement that 'God ... is not permitted' as a 'concept'

informing human geographical research. She supposed that all human geographers would entertain different, idiosyncratic assemblages of values, making generalizations difficult, but she also recognized the importance of supra-individual intellectual, 'cultural and political' values which can themselves become the focus of careful 'sociological' scrutiny (1974: Part II). While many have disagreed with the specifics of her arguments here (e.g. see the four commentaries appended to Buttimer, 1974), our view is that her insistence on human geographers being reflexive about the diverse values shaping their own work is one which continues to resonate loudly with more recent efforts at practising human geography.

Alongside humanistic geography, a self-professed radical geography emerged during the 1970s (Peet, 1977; 1978), anchored initially in the pages of *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, and subsequently diffusing to become a wide-ranging critical window on social and spatial inequalities of many different shades. Taking as its focus environmental and social problems with a clear geographical expression, from the devastation of rainforests to poverty, deprivation and disadvantage, a radical-geographical perspective arose which sought to expose the systematic structuring of injustice which leads to a world fragmented into spaces of plenty (occupied by 'the haves') and spaces of deficit (occupied by the 'have-nots'). Starting with approaches which did little more than document, table and map this polarity at various scales from the international to the intra-urban, radical geographers gradually evolved a conceptual basis for explaining these inequalities which included (sometimes contradictory) inputs from welfare economics, anarchist theory and different strands of Marxism.⁷ Some of the research undertaken in this vein retained a survey feel, albeit utilizing survey techniques to expose inequalities in phenomena such as income levels, housing conditions and

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ill-health indicators (this was particularly true of something called 'welfare geography': Smith, D.M., 1977; 1979; 1988b). Indeed, much of the research continued in a fashion not wholly different from the more scientific and quantitative cast of previous work, even if putting the data and techniques to a radical use critical of the social status quo, and even if fuelled by a commitment to radical (even revolutionary) social change wholly absent from the more 'establishment', often policy-orientated studies of previous generations, notably of spatial scientists. We will return to examine this commitment presently.

It may be claimed, then, that radical geography did not usher in as dramatic a change in the routine practices of human geographers as did humanistic geography. Its immediate methodological implications were not so great, even if conceptually and politically it was probably more unnerving to established modes of inquiry. None the less, mention might be made of the 'advocacy geography' experiment associated with William Bunge's attempt to shift the orbit of professional geographical research out of the university campus – together with the geographers themselves, and also their students – and into the streets of the inner city, chiefly the black inner city of Detroit, where the aims of studies should be directed by the articulated needs of poor inner-city residents themselves (see Colenutt, 1971; Horvarth, 1971; Bunge, 1971; 1975; Merrifield, 1995). Rather than offering yet another calibration of a 'central place model', for instance, advocacy geographers should be uncovering the geographies of slum processes, traffic accidents affecting children, diseases of babies and the like, and acting as advocates able to demonstrate the contours of problems to city authorities who might be sufficiently convinced by academic evidence to respond positively. Failing that, the geographers involved should be themselves involved in grassroots projects like building a

children's playground. This species of radical geography thus urged an action-based research, predicated on full involvement in a research activity designed to achieve highly practical ends: a policy-orientated research from below, on behalf of those who might with justification be referred to as 'the oppressed'.

Intriguingly, such research did have things in common with humanistic geography in that it depended upon a sustained participation in the lives and struggles of certain inner-city communities – Amaral and Wisner (1970) spoke of 'participant immersion' instead of a less involved 'participant observation' – and also because it forced researchers to deal with concrete ethical issues rooted in their responsibilities towards the relatively powerless people whom they were supposed to be serving. David Campbell expressly reflected upon 'role relationships in advocacy geography', underlining the virtues of a thoroughly democratic practice resistant to the 'elitism' common in most other work by human geographers, and striving instead to empower the research subjects who should 'become problematisers of their [own] situations and ... active creators of their [own] environment' (1974: 103). Moreover, and echoing still further the ethical charge of humanistic geography:

Constant self-criticism and re-evaluation in an attitude of humility and respect for others is ... a vital and healthy component of advocacy activity ... 'Humanising social change' [to borrow a phrase from Harvey] is dependent ... upon the ability of advocates and academics to create humanising relationships with those whom they work ... Radical science must be based upon a personal commitment to genuine communication with others in an attitude of mutual respect. (Campbell, 1974: 104–5)

The radical, politicized overtones of these remarks must have been anathema to the more 'conservative' geographers of the era, but they are ones with which many human geographers today would have great sympathy,

and the notion of democratic, empowering and respectful research practice will certainly reappear at various points in the chapters that follow.

More generally, the rise of radical geography, particularly in a guise which turned to Marxist critiques of the inequalities integral to a globalizing capitalist economic order, carried with it explicit commitments to a coherent political programme: one which oscillated between a reformist line, supposing that the existing state of society can be improved through the standard democratic process, and a revolutionary call for complete social transformation (at its crudest a call for the workers to seize control of the 'means of production' from the capitalists). David Harvey (1973) led the way when self-consciously shifting from a basically reformist line, associated with a welfare position, to an assertively revolutionary line convinced that the only way to create true 'social justice in the city' would require an overturning of capitalist forms of urbanism. This latter way forward would also necessitate an input from, if not necessarily a Leninist intellectual vanguard, then certainly a corpus of Marxist academics, geographers included, prepared to undertake the theoretical and practical work of planning revolutionary change. Radical geographers ever since have been wrestling with this tension between reformist and revolutionary ambitions, as is clear from recent debates played out in the pages of the journal *Society and Space* (Blomley, 1994; Chouinard, 1994; Tickell, 1995), and a further feature of debate has been the seeming gulf between radical theorizing in the academy and radical activism on the streets (see also Routledge, 1996; Farrow et al., 1997; Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999).

The principal point for us here, though, is that – just as Buttimer insisted on humanistic geographers incorporating explicit reflections on their basic values – radical geographers have often entertained some self-interrogation

about political values, objectives and involvements. Perhaps the most rigorous formulations in this respect have emerged from Jürgen Habermas (esp. 1972), a famous German Marxist intellectual, who has proposed the refining of an explicitly *critical* science or theory fitted to achieve 'the realisation of a[n] ... *emancipatory* interest' (Gregory, D., 1994: 107, emphasis in original) which would free all peoples of the world from the yoke of (capitalist) oppression. Habermas's vision explains how all varieties of intellectual labour are determined by 'cognitive interests' which turn their practices of knowledge production to particular ends, usually 'technical' or 'practical' ones functional to the maintenance of the social status quo (and an extension of his argument would include all varieties of human geography, including both spatial science and humanistic geography, as essentially 'reactionary' in this sense: see Gregory, D., 1978a). Following from such a recognition, however, the argument is that it should then be possible to frame a new version of intellectual endeavour predicated on an emancipatory cognitive interest which would be at once critical (of an inherently unjust world) and *self-critical* (constantly evaluating the extent to which the academic's own practices are emancipatory in both overall design and specific interventions). While rarely presented in such obviously Habermasian terms, except in Gregory's (1978a) statements about 'committed explanation in geography', it is arguably the case that this notion of being simultaneously critical and self-critical has energized the efforts of most radical geographers over the last two decades or so. We will pick up on the arguments about the politics of human geography, returning to some of the materials just outlined, in our final chapter (Chapter 12).

It would be possible to say more here about the burgeoning twists and turns in human geography which have, more recently, built

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upon the twin pillars of humanistic and radical geography to forge further dimensions for practising human geography. But for the sake of brevity, and yet to cover what have been pivotal new claims relevant to our practising theme, it will suffice now to mention certain aspects of the interlocking contributions made by both 'feminist geography' and 'post-colonial geography'. Feminist geography initially arose to provide an explicit examination of the specific spatial experiences, constraints and worlds of women, that 'other half' of humanity almost never considered by previous generations of male geographers (Tivers, 1978), and it quickly developed as a more fundamental critique of how unequal gender relations shape countless sociospatial structures endemic to a diversity of 'patriarchal' human societies past and present (McDowell, 1983; Foord and Gregson, 1986; WGSJ, 1984; 1997).

In the process questions of how to do feminist geography inevitably came to the fore, particularly in the matter of thinking about how research could be carried out which would enable the voices of women to be heard, notably when recounting their experiences of an everyday male superiority, harassment and even abuse accepted by many of them as sadly 'natural'. The task also became one of finding methods which would be sufficiently sensitive to tease out often very subtle dimensions to how women's perception and use of space differs from that of men, whether in terms of a phenomenon like the 'gender division of urban space' (McDowell, 1983) or something like women's fear of public spaces such as parks and subways (Valentine, 1989). It has been argued both within (esp. Rose, 1993b) and beyond the discipline that conventional models of academic inquiry, with their scientific and quantitative emphases, display an inherent 'masculinism' which militates against the kind of grounded research which is probably essential in this

context. The debates are tricky, but we can allow McDowell to be our guide in a passage which also signals the character of the specific methods that feminist academics, geographers included, have tended to favour in their own research:

Certain feminists ... not only reject the quantitative, 'scientific' approach to research, but argue that it is specifically a patriarchal model as it denies the significance of women's experience of oppression, classifies their concerns as private rather than shared, and embodies the values of traditional views of women's and men's expected positions in society. They have argued that feminist research should recognise and challenge the everyday experiences of women. In order to excavate women's experiences, feminist methods should value subjectivity, personal involvement, the qualitative and unquantifiable, complexity and uniqueness, and an awareness of the context within which the specific [issue] under investigation takes place. (1988: 166–7)

The onus shifts towards being a highly personalized research encounter, in which the most qualitative of methods such as in-depth interviewing and the taking of 'oral histories' of 'life stories' (see Chapter 5) are pursued in a manner which necessarily entails a sustained exchange – potentially one dealing with emotional materials – wherein the personalities of both researcher and researched cannot be arbitrarily suspended. For both parties involved, such an exchange is potentially draining, as well as being fraught with the dangers attendant upon the release of emotions, often resentments and angers, which will usually do far more to illuminate the realities of a given issue than could any other data source.⁸ We may be stressing the more extreme end of such feminist research here, and we acknowledge (and hope) that research encounters will not all be of this intensity, but we do wish to underscore just how much the researcher as a whole person – as an embodied individual with his or her own worries and frailties⁹ – enters into

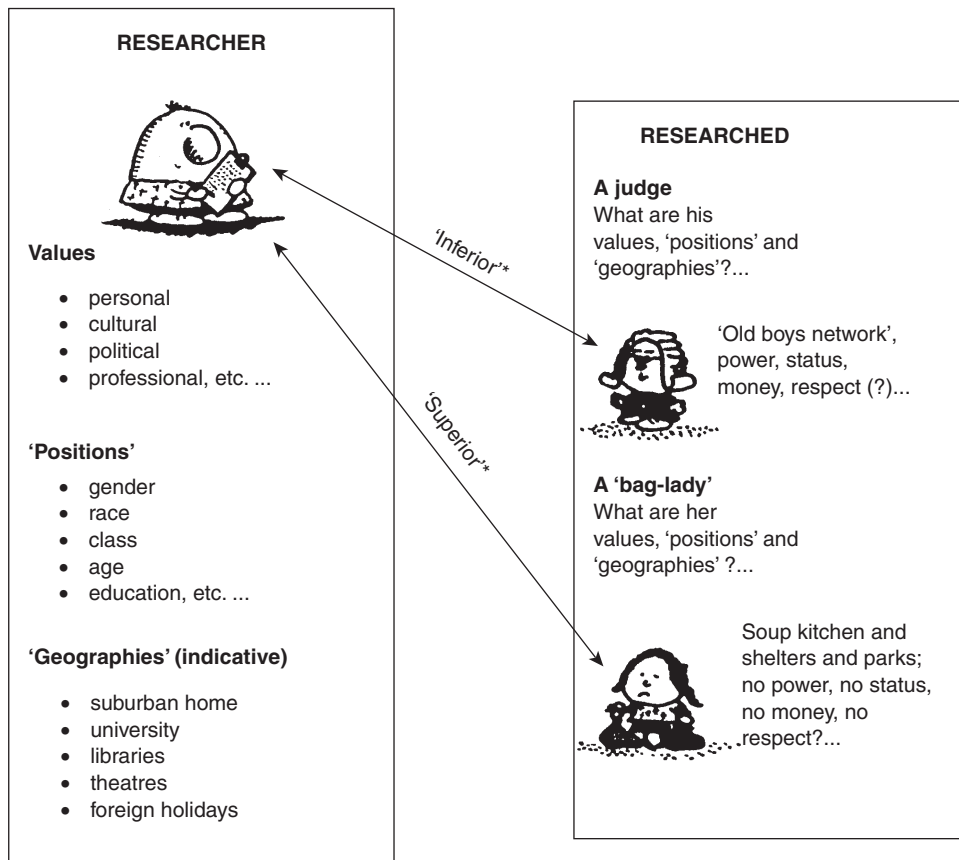
the feminist research frame. We have therefore travelled a very long way from the mostly fact-finding questions asked of, say, local farmers by a Sauer-esque geographer strolling one evening through a pleasant valley.

Feminist geographers do not only deploy such intensive methods, of course, as McDowell (1988) makes clear and as Hodge et al. (1995) also insist when assessing the possible use of quantitative techniques by feminists conducting geographical research. Yet we will stick with this picture of intense intersubjective research encounters – ones demanding an intimate meeting of two or more subjectivities: that of the researcher and those of the researched (see also Cook and Crang, 1995; see Chapter 10) – since such a picture is helpful in clarifying an additional set of claims. And what will also be useful in this respect is briefly to acknowledge the influence of postcolonial geography.¹⁰ If feminist geography confronts the axis of gender, problematizing its constitution as well as its effects, postcolonial geography confronts the axis of ‘race’, problematizing the inequalities between white people and people of colour which feature today in so many different situations under study by geographers (from the relations between ‘developed’ and ‘less developed’ countries to the circumstances of racial minorities in predominantly white Western cities). Given their acute sensitivity to axes of social difference, it is feminist and postcolonial geographers who have done most to reflect upon the problematic power relations which can arise in the research encounter, most starkly when men are researching their ‘other’ (women) or when white people are researching their ‘other’ (people of colour), but also in many other ways when differences of class, education, sexuality, age, (dis)ability and so on potentially drive a wedge between the world of the researcher and that of the researched. There are many thorny considerations here, but we

would suggest that the consensus emerging from recent texts such as Jackson (1993), Nast et al. (1994) and Cook and Crang (1995) is one insisting upon a ‘reflexive notion of knowledge’ (McDowell, 1992a: 399), the crux of which necessitates researchers reflecting critically upon their own ‘position(ality)’ – their own backgrounds, attributes and values, as bound up with their own personal geographies (the sites, localities and networks of their own biographies) – *in relation* to the ‘position(alitie)s’ of those peoples and places under study. Such a stance on the doing of qualitative human geography underlines much of the recent Limb and Dwyer (2001) collection, where four chapters explicitly debate matters of ‘positionality’.¹¹ We try to visualize this emerging model of intersecting positions in Figure 1.5, the implication being that the researcher should aim to clarify his or her own position in a wider societal hierarchy of power, status and influence, thereby ascertaining the different sorts of relationships – complete with the many differing roles, responsibilities and possible limitations to what can and should be ‘exposed’ about the researched – which may surface in a given research project.

From such a model it becomes apparent why it is impossible for a geographer like McDowell to leave behind her personal world in the same fashion as can a Sauer: this is not only because she has personal duties which she cannot forsake as easily as can most male academics, but it is also because she firmly believes that it is wrong in research terms to do so, since who she is (all the baggage of her own position) is so very pertinent to what she can achieve in her research. It shapes her gaining of access to particular research situations rather than others; it shapes her ability (and willingness) to build ‘research alliances’ of empathy, trust and dialogue between her and the people whom she researches (see also Pile, 1991); it shapes what findings she can obtain, the ways in which she will interpret these findings, and her sense of what is and is not

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*Conventional, if contestable, senses of the relative positions of the individuals concerned in a status hierarchy

Figure 1.5 Our visualization of the encounter between the differing 'position(alities)' of researcher and researched (the 'research subjects')

appropriate to reveal in final write-ups of projects undertaken. More particularly, it means that everything which she does in this regard cannot help but be influenced by her feminist experiences, values and politics, but she is reflexively aware of these feminist influences on her research and is self-critical about what they enable to be seen and what they might also occlude. She is thereby arguably *more* objective about the determinants of her research practices than are the likes of a Sauer or a spatial scientist.¹² While recognizing drawbacks with a visualization such as that provided in Figure 1.5, we do regard it as one which usefully pulls together

many of the themes which first surfaced in both humanistic and radical geography, but which have now been recast most effectively in the light of both feminist and postcolonial geography. This visualization is also one which readers might find useful to revisit at various points in the chapters which follow.

We should acknowledge that some human geographers may be unhappy about our narrative above, particularly given that we attach priority to 'being reflexive' and 'listening to voices' as the key recent developments in the practising of human geography, and in so

doing put less store by more technical innovations such as GIS or computational approaches. None the less, and as should be apparent from what we said above, we do feel that the latter innovations – while undoubtedly of great utility in certain projects – are less significant as contributions to a genuinely *human* geography than is the emergence of a self-critical reflexivity which begins ‘to question ... what we know, how we know it and what difference this makes both to the type of research that we do and who participates in it with us as either colleagues or research subjects’ (McDowell, 1992a: 399–400). This being said, we appreciate that there are still criticisms to be levelled at a reflexive human geography which claims to be good at listening to the voices of others, and which thereby sets itself up as (striving to be) both ethically sound and politically empowering in relation to (less privileged) peoples and places under study. In particular, Clive Barnett (1997) has suggested that there may be problems with the notion of ‘giving voice’ to others, in that there are many others in the world for whom silence may actually be a preferred, even more empowering, strategy. Similarly, Gillian Rose (1997a) has suggested that there are problems with the impression of ‘transparent reflexivity’ which is conveyed by the debate about position(ality) – the assumption that researchers can somehow lay bare the many dimensions which comprise their position(ality) – because, as a psychoanalytic perspective indicates, many of the impulses, desires and passions which feed through into our academic work are ultimately lodged in realms of the unconscious inaccessible to conscious reflection. Additionally, Rose criticizes notions of empowerment which operate with a ‘map’ of power such as that implied in Figure 1.5, given that it hints at the possibility of researchers being able to redistribute stores of power from position to position (from the powerful to the powerless, from themselves to

the people under study). As she rightly points out, the notion of power here is perhaps too simplistic, in that power arguably operates more relationally than both the map and claims about redistribution imply, as indeed has been claimed in various recent texts on the messy geographies of power (e.g. Hannah, 1997; Sharp et al., 2000). The arguments by Barnett and Rose are very much set within the horizons of thinking previously rehearsed in this subsection, however, and they comprise a gloss (albeit an important gloss) on recent debates about practising rather than the critical demolitions with which we concluded the two previous subsections of the chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have introduced many of the themes relevant to the practising of human geography, initially by contrasting two extreme examples of how different human geographers (‘Carl’ and ‘Linda’) go about the research process, and then by providing a more sustained review of changing ways in which human geography has been practised over the years. While wishing to suggest that there are still things of value to take from the first two approaches assessed here, in that their respective attributes of immersed observation and systematic rigour do contain much of merit, we are more firmly persuaded by the claims integral to the ‘being reflexive’ and ‘listening to voices’ orientation. Indeed, this latter orientation is now highlighting all manner of complications with the practising of human geography, countless issues which were either ignored in the past or were not called into play because different (arguably simpler) research questions were being asked, and in the course of this chapter we have sought gradually to draw out these complications for closer inspection. They are all ones which feature at various points in the book.

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To conclude this chapter, though, we will provide a summary listing of the major themes growing out of the above narrative. In terms of the *construction of data*, we have shown how past generations of human geographers have tended to regard the construction of data as a fairly unproblematic matter, something that 'simply happens' in the field or occurs as packets of statistics are sent to you in the post. Instead, it is now argued that much more attention really does need to be paid to precisely how these data are come by. Although this has not really been a theme above, consideration must be given to the composition of *preconstructed data*, as derived from sources other than the researcher's own primary research (see Chapters 2–4). Rather more has been said here about *self-constructed data*, those that have been pieced together through the researcher's own endeavours (see Chapters 5 and 6), and hence about the precise methods which need to be deployed. Rather than simply 'being there', having an intuitive 'eye for country', conducting list-like surveys or seeking out suitable large-scale numerical data sets, it has become vital to ponder more carefully than hitherto the researcher's methods. In particular, the necessity for formalizing and extending qualitative methods has become increasingly evident with the heightened concern for what people under study think, feel and do in their everyday lives. Questionnaires and, more especially, interviews and participant observation have thus become popular, with humanistic and feminist geographers being at the forefront of this sustained qualitative turn. Moreover, and particularly as these geographers have made plain, the researcher's own underlying values and ethical views cannot be discounted as an influence on how data are constructed, notably in the context of the uneven power relations running between (the positions of) the researcher and the researched. The many implications of this research relationship can never again be regarded as unimportant.

In terms of the *interpretation of data*, we have shown how past generations of human geographers have tended to regard the interpretation of data as equally unproblematic, something that involves gifted intuition or batteries of quantitative analysis. Instead, it is argued that a broader span of attention is now required to the overall interpretation of data, demanding much more than just the learning and refinement of new statistical-mathematical procedures. No longer is it assumed self-evident how researchers move from data to conclusions, with the whole terrain of interpretation becoming something requiring consideration, and different possibilities for interpretation needing to be explicitly weighed up by researchers (see Chapters 7–11). Moreover, and particularly as the humanistic, radical and feminist geographers have made plain, the researcher's own underlying values and political commitments cannot be discounted as an influence on how data are interpreted, and the clear message from such geographers is that we should be fully aware of – and prepared to reflect explicitly on – how the whole cast of our research is shaped by such values and commitments (and see also our Chapter 12).

Notes

- 1 Some of Sauer's key writings are collected in Leighley (1963).
- 2 Key writings by McDowell include (1983), (1989), (1999); and, for the women in the City work, see McDowell and Court (1994; McDowell, 1997).
- 3 See, for example, French (1940), Coleman (1954), Dilke (1965), Wheeler and Harding (1967), Archer and Dalton (1968), Yates and Robertson (1968) and Coleman and Lukehurst (1974).
- 4 A related issue is that the unthinking occulcentricism of the discipline is insensitive to geographers who are visually impaired, and it is rare to come across a proposal such as Kingman's (1969) regarding 'field study for the non-sighted'. More generally, those who celebrate the being there of fieldwork tend

- to assume the able-bodied status of all geographers, another aspect of neglecting the inaccessibility of many fieldwork sites to many individuals who are differently abled: see Hall et al. (2002).
- 5 Prime statements at the time about this variety of geography included Bunge (1962), Burton (1963), Harvey (1969), Abler et al. (1971) and Amedeo and Golledge (1975).
 - 6 In passing, it is worth repeating Barnes's (2001b: 552) point about the extent to which the early spatial scientists were fixated on their new 'machines', IBM mainframe computers and the like, and on the numerical analyses of large quantitative data sets now made possible by such technology.
 - 7 Key texts included Peet (1978), Smith, D.M. (1977; 1979), Harvey (1973; 1982); for summary details, see Cloke et al. (1991: ch. 2).
 - 8 See also recent claims about taking seriously the emotional registers of the researcher: Widdowfield (2000), Anderson and Smith (2001).
 - 9 See, for example, Pile (1991), Nast (1998), Parr (1998a), Dewsbury and Naylor (2002: esp. 256–7).
 - 10 See Crush (1994), Radcliffe (1994), Jacobs (1996) and Nash (2003).
 - 11 Butler; Ley and Mountz; Mohammad; Skelton.
 - 12 See also the claims in Philip (1998) drawing in part on Wright's (1947) notion of 'objective subjectivity'; see, too, Box 1.7.

