
Editorial

Gregory D. (1990)

A concern with textual strategy is fast becoming a commonplace across the whole spectrum of the humanities and the social sciences. Still, my own discipline has been remarkably slow to learn the lesson demonstrated over and over again by Gunnar Olsson in his extraordinary experiments: there is both a poetics *and* a politics of human geography and the two are closely connected.

In one sense it is perhaps scarcely surprising that it should have taken so long for that connective imperative to be recognised. During the last fin de siècle, a formative period in the history of the social sciences as a whole and one crucial for the institutionalisation of modern geography, there was a sharp conflict between literature and these upstart 'sciences'. Literary scholars insisted that they occupied a privileged position not only to understand social life but also, still more saliently, to map out its moral landscape. The pretensions of sociology and other would-be disciplines had to be exposed as a sham.⁽¹⁾ In the wake of these extraordinary squabbles, and in celebration of what many of their practitioners presumably regarded as victory, the social sciences accorded a special privilege to the apparatus of 'science' and, in particular, to those textual conceits that would mark their publications with the appropriate signs of objectivity.

One of the most obvious—and hence, I imagine, least remarked—of these scientific stigmata was the removal of the footnote and the rise of the Harvard reference system. The origins of the latter seem to be somewhat obscure, but by the 1930s it had been endorsed by a number of journals in anthropology, economics, and sociology. It appeared much later in geography, but the protracted death of the footnote provides a good index of the advance of spatial science and its derivatives. The Harvard reference system started to appear with increasing frequency in the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* from around 1965; in the same year Peter Haggett thought it sufficiently unusual to explain his use of it in *Locational Analysis in Human Geography*.⁽²⁾ In North America footnotes began to be suppressed in *Economic Geography* from around 1970, coincident with the publication of a supplement on spatial science (where they were replaced by an irritating and idiosyncratic referencing system of the journal's own devising). The *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* held out until around 1982, though it does still permit explanatory notes at the end of each paper, while the *Geographical Review* alone still prints its footnotes where they belong: at the foot of the page. This is not a random collection, of course, and there are in any case important differences in the referencing systems each journal now uses. But it is noticeable, I think, that the one journal that has positioned itself unambiguously

⁽¹⁾ For a general discussion, see Wolf Lepenies, **Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); originally published in German as **Die Drei Kulturen** (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1985). For a specific example from geography, see Richard Lafaille, "En lisant Reclus", *Annales de Géographie* 548 (1989) pp. 445–459. Lafaille suggests that Reclus was marginalized from mainstream geography not as a result of his radicalism but rather as a result of his refusal to accept the protocols of a nominally 'scientific' discipline at a time when its institutionalisation depended upon a demonstration of its scientific credentials.

⁽²⁾ Peter Haggett, **Locational Analysis in Human Geography** (London: Edward Arnold, 1965) p. xii. The scientific aspirations of this text need little gloss from me.

within the humanities is also the one journal that has refused to submit to the instrumentalities of the Harvard reference system.

You might think all this astonishingly parochial, so let me try to spell out why I think it matters so much. In the most general terms my argument turns on the contemporary rapprochement between the humanities and the social sciences: what Clifford Geertz once called the "blurring of the genres".⁽¹⁾ One of its consequences, so Geertz and others have claimed, is that the social sciences are now obliged to see themselves—however *else* they might see themselves—as "kinds of writing".⁽²⁾ This means that they must attend to the textual strategies and rhetorical devices which indelibly shape their arguments.⁽³⁾ The attempt to distance themselves from the meddlesome subjectivities of 'literature' has failed, as indeed it was bound to do.

But I have more particular concerns. To incorporate Harvard-style references into the body of the text is to impose an astonishing (and, in my view, a thoroughly regrettable) *linearity* on its construction. Leaving on one side the tiresome business of hurdling over those interminable brackets—a sort of Harvard steeplechase—I think it is exceptionally difficult to deal adequately with the interpretative issues which cluster around any argument unless one uses footnotes. This is presumably why the *Journal of Historical Geography* avoids the Harvard reference system, which is quite inappropriate for any form of historical inquiry. It cannot deal with the complex citation of multiple and often fractured sources whose use and on occasion even location need sensitive and careful noting. But the same applies to those other sources on which we all routinely draw: the secondary literature. What I have in mind here is not only the careful annotation that any reference to the writings of (say) Marx or Weber requires. This is of course important, given the existence of multiple editions, and it would at least avoid the crass use of unelaborated references to "Marx (1967)" or "Weber (1969)" which give no indication of the date of original publication. But footnotes are more than bibliographical crutches. They can explain why particular references have been cited and adjudicate between them; they can draw attention to differences and qualifications that need to be entered but which, if placed in the body of the text, would disrupt the integrity of the argument; and they can refer back to previous paragraphs or anticipate those yet to come, and so reveal something of the multiple layering of the argument. Without nuancing of this kind, one sometimes suspects that a group of references have been confined within the same set of brackets simply because the 3×5 cards happened to be dealt in that order.

Perhaps another way of sharpening the same point is to suggest that the Harvard model provides for a markedly *monological* reading of the text. In effect, the author appeals to the reader and seeks to establish his or her authority through a series of

⁽¹⁾ Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁽²⁾ The phrase comes from Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a kind of writing", in his *Consequences of pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) pp. 89–109; but see also Philippe Carrard, "History as a kind of writing: on the poetics of historiography", *Historical Reflections* 15 (1988) pp. 443–453 and Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

⁽³⁾ Similar concerns are now a commonplace in the natural sciences too: see, for example, John Angus Campbell, "Charles Darwin: rhetorician of science", in John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey (eds.), *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) pp. 69–85; Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987); Georgy Markus, "Why is there no hermeneutics of natural sciences? Some preliminary theses", *Science in Context* 1 (1987) pp. 5–51. I should perhaps add that Markus's central point is that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, there is a hermeneutics of the natural sciences.

'expert witnesses', so to speak, who are made to appear unanimous in their support by their mere appearance within the same set of brackets. This closes the text to an astonishing degree, I think, whereas a carefully crafted footnote can open up an argument and allow the reader to enter much more explicitly into the process of its construction. Now it may well be that the conventional models of social science would prefer to conceal their argumentative and rhetorical character: to present themselves as mere 'reports', neutral in composition and content, transparently mimetic of their subject, and miraculously outside the hermeneutic circle. But any genuinely critical inquiry surely has no business presenting itself in this way.

There are no doubt counterarguments to be put, but I have consulted the *Chicago Manual of Style*⁽¹⁾—which offers one of the more detailed discussions of these matters—and I have to say that I find its claims specious. We are told, for example, that if one 'knows' the literature it is much more convenient to have simply the author and date cited in the text. Apart from confirming the closure of the argument around a group of insiders, this is absurd. I know the literature reasonably well, I think, but I would have no idea what Johnston (1985) referred to: if one knows the literature at all, one knows that there are simply too many of them! And, of course, the claim is fully reversible. If one does not 'know' the literature, then it is much more convenient to have the full reference on the same page as the text. This can often clarify the argument considerably, since it is usually possible to see from the very titles the precise point that is being made. The style manual also tells us that it is much easier to make changes at proof stage using the Harvard system. This was no doubt true when we all used typewriters and when printers set their type by hand; but if I can now make any change I like on my word processor and have all the consequent changes made at the same time automatically, I cannot believe that printers are unable to do the same.

I am aware that there is an irony in saying all this in an editorial in *Society and Space*. Our journal is innovative in so many ways, not only in content but also in style: think of the imaginative use of photographs and colour plates in recent issues. These things are not incidental to what the journal is about, because they dissolve the redundant boundaries between the humanities and the social sciences. Rescuing the footnote would work towards the same end. It would also cure the malady which vexed one contributor to the *British Medical Journal* at the end of the last war. The use of the Harvard reference system in its pages, he complained, meant that "the many authors' names are interspersed in the text like the stones in a cherry pie, and produce mental indigestion unless discarded" (Hewer, 1945)⁽²⁾.

D. Gregory

⁽¹⁾ *Chicago Manual of Style* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

⁽²⁾ C.L. Hewer, letter to the *British Medical Journal* 1 (1945) pp. 233–234; cited in D. W. Krummel, *Bibliographies: Their Aims and Methods* (London: Mansell, 1984) p. 67. The citation is made, appropriately, in note 2.