Journal of Historical Geography xxx (2013) 1–7

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Journal of Historical Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhg

Feature: The art of travel and exploration

Introduction: mapping the art of travel and exploration

Geoff Quilley

Department of Art History, University of Sussex, Falmer, Sussex BN1 9QN, UK

Abstract

This paper introduces a set of six essays for a special issue of the *Journal of Historical Geography* on 'The art of travel and exploration'. Taking the voyages of Captain Cook as a reference point, it argues that the centrality of Cook in the historiography of exploration and its attendant visual culture has tended to eclipse other important visual records and archives, which the essays here are instead concerned to address. They are, therefore, post-Cook, focussing on the period from the 1770s to the 1840s, to offer a variety of interpretative strategies, and treating of subject matter relating to a series of distinct global places and cultures, as a means of demonstrating the significance of diverse forms of visual culture connected with travel and geographical exploration. It takes mapping, and in particular an artistically enhanced version of Cook's chart of the southern hemisphere made on his second voyage, as a case study both to suggest the interconnectedness between art history and historical geography through travel imagery, and also to outline the ways the essays here move beyond the Cook paradigm, through addressing in various, individual ways four key critical areas which mark out travel imagery from other forms of visual culture. Broadly, these can be defined as: issues of time, place and circumstances of production; practices of observation and recording; the imperial context; the influence of Cook.

Keywords: Art and travel; Captain Cook; Mapping; Place; Empire; Direct observation

Over the past two decades much scholarship in historical geography and related fields has been concerned with travel and/or visual culture. This has prioritized an interdisciplinary approach that has conflated or elided previous distinctions between, for example, imperial history, geography, anthropology and art.[1] Travel, its historical practices and cultures, in this sense assumes a paradigmatic status, as a phenomenon that defies any single scholarly categorization and demands a multi- or inter-disciplinary analysis. This is particularly the case for eighteenth-century studies, and above all in relation to British culture, where the recent 'imperial turn' in (visual) cultural studies has emerged, at least to a large extent, from an abiding concern with travel and related issues in literature, anthropology, social and economic history, historical geography, and even theatre studies.[2] This is, of course, in one sense a reflection of the vast proliferation in travel-related material occasioned by the rapid expansion of geographical exploration and global empire during the course of the eighteenth century. Yet it is also an indication of the abiding priorities that have underpinned British art history and visual culture studies of this period, in emphasizing hitherto an overwhelmingly insular approach that has displaced issues of travel and empire as matters for serious consideration; and perhaps the only surprise is that it has taken so long for art history and visual culture studies to attend seriously and in depth to this extensive and challenging field of scholarship.

Travel literature as a genre, for example, was among the most popular forms of publication for an avid eighteenth-century readership, ranging from the novel to shipwreck survivor narratives to the detailed reports of Admiralty or East India Company voyages, and thus inhabiting the fertile interstices between fact and fiction, and flourishing as an endless horizon of imagined geographies. The

E-mail address: g.quilley@sussex.ac.uk

[1] See, in particular, the work of Luciana Martins: L. Martins, Mapping tropical waters: British views and visions of Rio de Janeiro, in: D. Cosgrove (Ed), *Mappings*, London, 1999, 148–168; L. Martins, The art of tropical travel, 1768–1830, in: M. Ogborn and C.W.J. Withers (Eds), *Georgian Geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century*, Manchester, 2004, 72–91; F. Driver and L. Martins (Eds), *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*, Chicago, 2005; L. Martins and F. Driver, John Septimus Roe and the art of navigation, c.1815–1830, in: T. Barringer, G. Quilley and D. Fordham (Eds), *Art and the British Empire*, Manchester, 2007, 53–66; Also F. Driver and L. Jones, *Hidden Histories of Exploration: Researching the RGS-IBG Collections*, London, 2009. See also the work produced under the Landscape and Environment Programme, inaugurated by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under the directorship of Professor Stephen Daniels in 2005 (http://www.landscape.ac.uk/landscape/index.aspx, accessed 8 July 2013), including the series of networks and workshops on Art and Travel, led by the National Maritime Museum, directed by Geoff Quilley (http://www.rmg.co.uk/researchers/research-areas-and-projects/cart/, accessed 8 July 2013).

[2] From among many influential recent publications see, for example, M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London and New York, 1992; revised and expanded, 2007; N. Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, Cambridge, 1994; J. Elsner and J.-P. Rubiés (Eds), *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel*, London, 1999; A. Gilroy (Ed), *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel 1775–1844*, Manchester, 2000; J. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York, 1996.

0305-7488/$ – see front matter
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2013.07.022

importance of exploration to this cultural outpouring, and particularly the three circumnavigations of James Cook between 1768 and 1780, can hardly be overstated: and travel generally, and Cook's voyages in particular, have received extravagant attention in literary studies.[3] However, the literary accounts of these voyages were equalled, if not superseded, by a rich corpus of visual imagery produced both during and after the voyages, to an unprecedented scale and standard, by artists specially appointed to them; which demonstrated an increasing primacy for the visual over the verbal, in being 'part of a more general cultural conviction current in the late eighteenth century, which saw pictorial forms occupy a privileged position in the communication of knowledge'.[4] Ever since Rüdiger Joppien and Bernard Smith's magisterial survey in the mid-1980s, the 'art of Captain Cook's voyages' has attracted an increasing amount of scholarly interest across a diverse range of academic disciplines. However, in art history the 'art of Cook's voyages' has largely been treated either as exceptional and effectively unique, or else as typifying so fully a genre of travel imagery, that the rest requires little or no discussion.[5]

Yet, when travel in general can be identified as one of the dominant themes and narrative structures of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British literature; and when maritime travel, in particular, had such a deep-seated significance for a developing mythology of national identity in terms of its supposed maritime destiny, it is surely important to consider the abundance of travel-related imagery produced in this period in association with military, commercial or exploratory voyaging, and not only that stemming from Cook's voyages, important as they are.[6] This is true not just of the extensive visual records comprising landscape, topography, coastal profiling, or 'ethnographic' representations of native peoples and artefacts; but of other abundant forms of graphic imagery that constitute essential primary source material for historical geography but are not conventionally addressed by art historians, such as hydrography and cartography. Maps offer the most obvious site of congruence – or collision – between the languages of art history and historical geography; and it is worth considering some of the implications of this disciplinary and semiotic overlap, as a means to point to some of the issues of representation in related, figurative travel imagery, with which the essays in this volume are concerned. Even though the authors here rarely engage directly with maps and charts in their discussions of travel and exploration, the range of imagery they analyze, like maps and mapping, occupies an ambiguous place within the genres of visual culture; and in their very ambiguity, maps and travel imagery throw light onto disciplinary genealogies that help us to understand the relation between art history and historical geography, with which all the essays here are directly or implicitly concerned. Mapping also offers a convenient point of departure, so to speak, for reflecting on the dominant presence of Cook and how the authors here negotiate, subvert or otherwise engage with his massive historiographical influence.

It now goes virtually without saying that mapping is far from ideologically neutral – 'the record of man's attempt to understand the world he lives in… a seemingly objective image of the land [which] lays stress on its basis as at once mathematical and scientific measure of the earth's surface' – but is the product of a densely complex, discursive matrix of signs and systems of signification, and is therefore 'a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations'.[7] The same must be said of the mass of ostensibly documentary, illustrative art work produced in the context of travel, which for the most part has been treated as just that – documentary illustration. Yet, like maps, the mass of travel-related visual culture of this period can be interrogated for its ideological underpinnings and biases, not least through observing its 'silences', the way such apparently transparent images 'exert a social influence through their omissions as much as the features they depict and emphasize'.[8] Thus many of the essays here are explicitly concerned to read 'against the grain' images that on the surface might appear as largely unproblematic and uncontentious.

However, there is a parallel history at play here that complicates the issue. For, maps, at least those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have been tied to a larger history of science and empirical geographical knowledge.[9] In many respects this is certainly justified: the difference is undeniable between the world map of the first half of the eighteenth century and that of the early decades of the nineteenth, in terms of the remarkable transformation in the degree of data presented. And here again Cook emerges as a pivotal figure, not least because the difference in cartographic data was almost entirely dependent on navigation and developments in navigational charting. As Roy Porter has observed, the *lacunae* in

[3] The study of travel literature as a discrete field of modern literary studies was stimulated, if not inaugurated, by P.G. Adams's still relevant *Travelers and Travel Liars 1660–1800*, Berkeley, 1962. For more recent important studies see, for example, N. Rennie, *Far-Fetched Facts: the Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas*, Oxford, 1995; J. Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas 1680–1840*, Chicago, 2001; H. Guest, *Empire, Barbarism, and Civilisation: Captain Cook, William Hodges, and the Return to the Pacific*, Cambridge, 2007.

[4] J. Bonehill, Hodges and Cook's second voyage, in: G. Quilley and J. Bonehill (Eds), *William Hodges 1744–1797: the Art of Exploration*, New Haven and London, 2004, 75.

[5] The major exception here is B.M. Stafford, *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760–1840*, Cambridge, Mass., 1984.

[6] On the sea and national identity, see G. O'Hara, *Britain and the Sea since 1600*, Basingstoke, 2010; G. Quilley, *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain, 1768–1829*, New Haven and London, 2011.

[7] *The World Encompassed*, Baltimore, 1952, xi, quoted in G.N.G. Clarke, Taking possession: the cartouche as cultural text in eighteenth-century American maps, *Word & Image* 4 (1988) 455; J.B. Harley, Maps, knowledge, and power, in: J.B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, Baltimore and London, 2001, 51–81, first published in: D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (Eds), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, Cambridge, 1988, 277–312. Harley was among the first historians of cartography to analyze maps in terms of semiotics and Foucauldian discourse theory: see also J.B. Harley, Silences and secrecy: the hidden agenda of cartography in early modern Europe, *Imago Mundi* 40 (1988) 57–76; J.B. Harley, Deconstructing the map, *Cartographica* 26 (1989) 1–20, reprinted in: T.J. Barnes and J.S. Duncan (Eds), *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, London, 1992, 231–247. These and other essays have been reprinted as the edited collection, *The New Nature of Maps*, cited above; For discussions of the relationship of cartography to art in the late-medieval to early-modern periods, see R. Rees, Historical links between cartography and art, *Geographical Review* 70 (1980) 60–78; D. Woodward (Ed), *Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays*, Chicago, 1987; N. Alfrey and S. Daniels (Eds), *Mapping the Landscape: Essays on Art and Cartography*, Nottingham, 1990. For other important studies of mapping generally, see Cosgrove (Ed), *Mappings* (note 1); M. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843*, Chicago, 1997; J.R. Akerman (Ed), *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, Chicago, 2009; P. Barber and T. Harper, *Magnificent Maps: Power, Propaganda and Art*, London, 2010; Of particular relevance to Cook and the eighteenth century are: D.W. Clayton, The creation of imperial space in the Pacific Northwest, *Journal of Historical Geography* 26 (2000) 327–350; D. W. Clayton, Georgian geographies 'from and for the margins': 'King George Men' on the north-west coast of North America, in: Ogborn and Withers (Eds), *Georgian Geographies* (note 1), 24–51.

[8] The term is again Brian Harley's: Harley, Maps, knowledge, and power (note 7), 67.

[9] On the historiography of geographical traditions, see D. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise*, Oxford, 1992; C.W.J. Withers, Geography, natural history, and the eighteenth-century enlightenment: putting the world in place, *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995) 137–164; C.W.J. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason*, Chicago, 2007.

Please cite this article in press as: Quilley G, Introduction: mapping the art of travel and exploration, Journal of Historical Geography (2013), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2013.07.022