

CULTURES OF TRAVEL AND SPATIAL FORMATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

DEREK GREGORY^{*)}*Zusammenfassung:* Kultur des Reisens und räumliche Formationen von Wissen

Jüngere Arbeiten haben zwei Wege hervorgehoben, auf denen Geographie im Rahmen des expansiven, kolonialisierenden Ideals eines post-aufklärerischen Europa in Produktion von Wissen umgeschrieben wurde: wie war es den zuhause Gebliebenen möglich, den Berichten jener zu glauben, die fremde Länder bereist hatten? Wie war es möglich, lokale, nicht-europäische Wissensbestände in das Bezugssystem einer angeblich souveränen Europäischen Vernunft zu bringen? Dieser Aufsatz behandelt eine dritte Thematik, welche über die Produktion von Räumen ebenfalls die Produktionen von Wissen geformt hat, nämlich die Art und Weise, wie die von den Reisenden beschriebenen Routen (ihre Wege und Rundreisen) die Beschreibung dieser Routen (ihren Text) beeinflusst hat. Es werden drei Topologien identifiziert, welche im langen neunzehnten Jahrhundert Eingang in die räumliche Konfiguration von Wissen gefunden haben. Der erste ist ein „rhizomatischer Raum“ (ein komplexer Raum ohne Zentrum), illustriert durch kritisches Lesen von Alexander von Humboldts Reisen durch Amazonien und Mary Kingsleys Reisen in Westafrika; der zweite ist ein „labyrinthischer Raum“ (ein komplexer Raum mit einem Zentrum), illustriert am Beispiel von Sophia Pooles Reisen durch Kairo; der dritte ist ein „gefaserter Raum“ (ein geordneter, linearer Raum), illustriert anhand der Darstellung von Europa in der Grand Tour und in modernen Reiseführern. In jedem der drei Fälle liegt die Betonung auf der Frage, wie die Räume der Topographie und des Textes ineinander und auseinander gefaltet werden und dadurch räumliche Formationen bilden, die Konstellationen von Macht, Wissen und Geographie sind.

Summary: Recent work has emphasised two, acutely material ways in which geography was written into the production of knowledge within the expansive, colonising imaginary of post-Enlightenment Europe: how was it possible for those who stayed at home to believe the reports of those who had travelled abroad? and how was it possible for local, non-European knowledges to be brought within the framework of a supposedly sovereign European Reason? This essay considers a third thematic that also shaped productions of knowledge through productions of space: the modalities through which the routes described by travellers (their paths and circuits) shaped their descriptions of those routes (their texts). Three topologies are identified that entered into spatial formations of knowledge in the long nineteenth century. The first is a rhizomatic space (a complex space with no centre), illustrated through critical readings of Alexander von Humboldt's travels through the Amazon and Mary Kingsley's travels in West Africa; the second is a labyrinthine space (a complex space with a centre), illustrated through Sophia Poole's journeys through Cairo; the third is a striated space (an ordered, linear space), illustrated through the ways in which Europe was itself scripted by the Grand Tour and the modern guidebook. In each case the emphasis is on the ways in which the spaces of topography and text are folded into and out of one another and thus shape – literally 'form' – spatial formations that are constellations of power, knowledge and geography.

Travel, travelling theory and knowledge

"The Western eye has fundamentally been a wandering eye, a travelling lens. These peregrinations have often been violent and insistent on mirrors for a conquering self – but not always." (HARAWAY 1991).

It has become something of a commonplace to consider the ways in which metaphors of travel not only enter into but also *shape* formations of knowledge.¹⁾ Much of this has been a response to what JAMES CLIFFORD identified as the late twentieth-century 'predica-

ment of culture'. 'We ground things, now, on a moving earth,' he wrote (CLIFFORD 1986, 22):

'There is no longer any place of overview (mountaintop) from which to map human ways of life, no Archimedian point from which to represent the world. Mountains are in constant motion. So are islands: for one cannot occupy, unambiguously, a bounded cultural world from which to journey out and analyse other cultures. Human ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate and subvert one another.'

This is, in many ways, the *imago mundi* that has been developed with such economy by HARAWAY (1991). If all knowledge is what she calls 'situated knowledge' – if it is impossible to pull 'the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere' – then there is surely a compelling responsibility to travel, to reach out and create what she calls 'webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology' that will subvert totalization, resist closure and remain alive to

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¹⁾ See ABBEELE (1992); KAPLAN (1996).

the 'unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible.'²⁾ SAID (1984) advances a parallel argument when he both insists on the importance of 'travelling theory' – on the movement of ideas as an enabling condition of intellectual activity – and cautions against its promiscuous rigidity: ideas are interventions in specific situations, and as they move from place to place they need to be subjected to a critical consciousness, 'a sort of spatial sense', that keeps them open to other topographies of power and affect. For much the same reason he also emphasises the significance of 'affiliation' for critical practice. Whereas conventional readings privilege filiation, and treat texts as a vertical series or sequence, affiliation brings into view the mobile network of transverse relations in which a text is embedded, and so draws attention to the location of the text – its 'worldliness' – whose disclosure requires a 'contrapuntal reading' sensitive to its 'geo-graphy' (SAID 1984; 1993).

But as HARAWAY (1991), CLIFFORD (1986) and SAID (1984) all know very well, metaphors of travel are irredeemably compromised – how could they be otherwise?³⁾ – which is, in part, why so much of the recuperation of travelling metaphors turns out to involve a return to a colonial past that continues to invest our colonial present with much of its meaning and, specifically, to a late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European 'culture of travel' (GREWAL 1996a, 4) that continues to shape the ways in which knowledge is to be produced, proliferated and evaluated. Such a move displaces that deceptively innocent little 'now' in CLIFFORD's opening image: 'We ground things, *now*, on a moving earth' (CLIFFORD 1988, 14). In fact, the ground has been shifting for much longer than CLIFFORD acknowledges. Here, for example, is GREENBLATT (1991, 121) writing of the voyagers of early modern Europe:

'What is the origin of the boundaries that enable us to speak of "within" and "without"? Cultures are inherently unstable, mediatory modes of fashioning experience. Only as a result of the social imposition of an imaginary order of exclusion – through the operation of what ... I will call "blockage" – can culture be invoked as a stable entity within which there are characteristic representations that are ordered, exported, accommodated. Such blockage occurs constantly – an infinite, unrestricted, undifferentiated circulation would lead to the collapse of identity altogether – but it is never absolute. The rhetoric of absolute blockage is everywhere in the discourse of early modern Europe, but the

reality is more porous, more open, more unsettled than it first appears ... Any representation can be circulated. And it is the character of this circulation – secret or open, rapid or sluggish, violently imposed or freely embraced, constrained by guilt and anxiety or experienced as pleasure – that regulates the accommodation, assimilation, and representation of the culture of the other.'⁴⁾

This is not to say that nothing changed between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, of course, but in recognising the fractured history of these blockages and instabilities, and, crucially, their embeddedness within what CLIFFORD calls 'an older topography of travel', the genealogical curve of his project is redrawn. So too, I think, is its geography. CLIFFORD's is an ethnography – and an epistemology – of displacement, in which travel is regarded not as a mere supplement to the production of cultural meanings but as pervasively *constitutive* of them: 'Travels and contacts are crucial sites for an unfinished modernity' (CLIFFORD 1997b, 10–11). So they are. It is for this reason that CLIFFORD (1997a, 31) urges his readers 'to take travel knowledges seriously'. And yet: even though he uses 'travel' to denote 'a range of material, spatial practices' it is, oddly, the very *spatialities* of travel – and, by implication, of formations of knowledge – that disappear from his view (CLIFFORD 1997a, 39). In what follows I propose to take some preliminary steps towards mapping some of those doubled spatialities, and I do so by returning to post-Enlightenment Europe and its cultures of travel.

Productions of space and productions of knowledge

'The two great mythical experiences on which the philosophy of the eighteenth century had wished to base its beginnings [were] the foreign spectator in an unknown country and the man born blind restored to light.' (Michel Foucault, *The birth of the clinic*)

The epistemological imaginary of post-Enlightenment Europe traded on two dominant motifs: one which treated the production of knowledge as a journey of discovery, a movement from darkness to light, in the course of which the unknown was to be made over into the known, placed within an intellectual landscape that could be mapped as a transparent space; and the other which treated the production of knowledge as a sort of pilgrim's progress, in the course of which the heroic traveller faced down various snares and demons, testimony to his purity of epistemological purpose, to arrive triumphantly at the Truth.

²⁾ The parallel with CLIFFORD is a close one: where he insists on 'partial truths' she insists on 'partial perspective'.

³⁾ See, for example, the discussion following CLIFFORD (1997) and WOLFF (1993).

⁴⁾ Here GREENBLATT effectively trades on the production and circulation of what SAID calls 'imaginative geographies': cf. SAID (1995, 49 and *passim*).

I have just implied that the (normative) traveller was a man, and the gendering of this imaginary-itinerary has properly become a commonplace of feminist criticism. Its masculinist assumptions imprint these motifs as two sides of the same, recto and verso, that together suture travel to transparency and truth. Yet those sutures were far from secure: the same was always vulnerable to its epistemic others. In particular, if we accentuate the corporeality and materiality that invests cultures of travel, then two predicaments immediately intervene in the passage between 'here' and 'there' to assert the *heterogeneity* and *instability* of these geographies of knowledge.

Travel and trust

The first of these predicaments concerns the ways in which travellers sought to guarantee the credibility of their accounts. The central question was this: on what terms was it possible for reports of what had been seen to be believed by those who had not seen? This dilemma was exacerbated by the trials of the traveller, his entranced immersion in a world of immediate impressions and fugitive sensations, which – as OUTRAM (1999) has shown – was why the French naturalist Georges Cuvier (1769–1832) believed that the travelling observer 'was doomed to remain precisely that':

'For Cuvier, the formation of new knowledge in continuous passage through space, the very essence of exploration, was deeply suspect. For him, travel does not make truth. On the contrary. For Cuvier, mastery over and real comprehension of the order of nature, comes not from passage but from immobility. The apparently heroic field observer lies in fact under the tyranny of the immediate. Real courage, Cuvier argues, means to create an ordered structure out of the immediacy of experience, not to be tempted by its momentary vividness ... Cuvier argues that true knowledge of the order of nature comes from the very fact of the observer's distance. It depends exactly on not being there ...'⁵⁾

What turned out to be decisive for scientific exploration and the production of its knowledges was less instrumentation, so OUTRAM (1999) argues, and much

more 'the proliferation of taxonomic systems, whose abstraction was strikingly successful in acting as a diagnostic for the previously unseen'. But abstraction and diagnosis were not enough: what mattered, decisively so, was the faith placed in these taxonomic systems and the geography of trust that they conveyed. As FOUCAULT (1970) shows, these systems were themselves spatializations of knowledge, moments in the production of a space of constructed visibility, by means of which 'the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order' (PRATT, 1992, 31). The elaboration of these taxonomic systems, their proliferation and circulation, entered into the formation and fixing of 'centres of calculation' where stocks of new knowledge could be accumulated, processed and valorized. And yet even this epistemic journey was freighted with uncertainty: as its agents moved beyond Europe, so natural history was at once seduced and tormented by a 'queer' nature – an 'unnatural Nature' – that was often stubbornly resistant to being disciplined within the cellular grids of a singular Space of Reason.

Travel and local knowledge

The second predicament concerns the ways in which travellers relied on and appropriated indigenous ('local') knowledges. Their projects privileged the sovereignty of a nominally universal, prescriptively European Reason through the marginalisation and erasure of local knowledges, but these none the less remained present in their texts as a sort of 'ghost-writing'. This was the epistemological equivalent of the discursive strategies through which early explorers so often removed native populations from the landscapes through which they travelled: just as 'Africa' was constructed as an empty space awaiting its colonial occupation, so knowledge of 'Africa' was constructed as an empty space to be filled by colonial science (PRATT 1985). And yet, as BARNETT's (1998) reading of the journals of Victorian explorers in Africa has shown,

'Without the use of local guides and interpreters, the exploits of [these] men represented as untiringly persevering, independent and self-denying seekers of the truth would have been impossible. But this routine *practical* dependence on local knowledges and information is not accorded any independent *epistemological* value. Local knowledge is refashioned as a hindrance, as a barrier to the arrival at the truth. Its presence in the discourse of geographical discovery is framed by a rhetoric of doubt and suspicion. It is normal practice, in reports of what a traveller has observed, mapped and measured, to add a comment reporting what has been told to him by local

⁵⁾ OUTRAM develops this distinction through Cuvier's own comparison with Humboldt – though, as I have shown elsewhere, I suspect that the contrast is much sharper in the case of Cuvier and Geoffroy St Hilaire (GREGORY, forthcoming) – but other explorers and travellers can be read in similar ways. Hence, for example, PAUL CARTER's (1987) distinction between Banks and Cook: for Banks 'knowledge is precisely what survives unimpaired the translation from soil to plate and Latin inscription' whereas Cook's 'geo-graphy' was 'inseparable from the conditions of inquiry itself'.

inhabitants about the territory he has not yet reconnoitred. If local knowledge thus appears as a lure, it is nonetheless ascribed no independent status as knowledge. Indigenous geographical meanings and knowledges are admitted into this discourse on the condition of being stripped of any validity independent of European definitions of scientific truth. The potential for the possessive authority of European travellers to be undermined by admission of their interactions with indigenous societies is countered by presenting indigenous knowledge as simply awaiting confirmation by the scientific traveller.⁶

The production of travel knowledge was thus never the simple and singular *projection* of a European will-to-power – it was, as BARNETT (1998) puts it, always marked as an ‘impure and worldly geography’ – since subaltern populations were typically the *source* as well as the object of its various knowledges.⁶⁾

It is for this reason that PRATT (1992, 6) has emphasised the reciprocal process of *transculturation* that takes place within the contact zone (and beyond).⁷⁾ But it is important to understand that this was at once profoundly unequal and highly ambivalent, and that the conditions of possibility for the production of scientific knowledges were inherently *agonistic*. This was not simply a matter of the ‘resistance’ of local people – a term which has in any case become over-burdened and over-extended⁸⁾ – because in many (perhaps most) cases, as FABIAN (2000, 271) has demonstrated in detail, one of the most pervasive experiences of European explorers in Africa was that of dependency:

‘Travelers depended on things – funds, equipment, and commodities – and the more things they had, the more they had to struggle with problems of logistics. And they depended on people. Especially during their first journeys, they were amateurs at African travel compared to their guides, interpreters and porters. The more professional these helpers were, the more dependent the explorers became on their knowledge, even before they themselves were ready to produce the kind of knowledge they were expected to bring back.’

⁶⁾ FABIAN (1999) makes an analytical distinction between ‘knowledge-as-projection’ – the imposition of preconceptions and stereotypes – and those ‘insights and understandings that cannot be brought along and that, when they occur, change the knower’.

⁷⁾ She borrows ‘transculturation’ from the Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, who juxtaposed the term to ‘acculturation’: whereas acculturation implies the adjustment of a subordinate culture to the impositions and exactions of a dominant culture, transculturation implies a dynamic relation of combination and contradiction. For a critical discussion of the genealogy of the concept, see BEVERLEY (1999).

⁸⁾ But for a careful analysis see MACDONALD (1998).

It was those expectations that were foregrounded in their writings, and which did so much to perpetuate the mythology of exploration and travel as a process of purification, transforming the dark places of the ‘unknown’ into the white space of the ‘known’ – in the limit-case of Africa, ‘flooding the “Dark Continent” with light’ – to produce and sanctify its knowledges within a supposedly singular and sovereign Space of Reason. ‘Reason’ is by now a thoroughly compromised term, of course, and the white space of exploration and science was by no means the only territory invested with rationalities: the horizons of meaning produced by ‘local knowledges’ were scarcely ‘irrational’. But one of FABIAN’s central claims is that the conduct of many white explorers did not conform to their own model of what ought to count as rational. Their nominally ‘objective knowledges’ were often produced – indeed, FABIAN (2000) suggests that perhaps they even *had* to be produced – in a condition of what he calls ‘ecstasis’ that emerged from and flowed back into their encounters with local people. The practical effort to understand the language-games of other cultures, to *make* sense, loosened and on occasion overwhelmed their tenuous hold on their own certainties, transporting them not only beyond the space of their categorizations – their fixed taxonomies – but also, FABIAN (2000, 8 and 280) argues, ‘out of their minds’.

Topographies and texts

These twin predicaments imply – in various ways – spatial formations of knowledge. In the remainder of this essay I want to explore a third thematic that also shapes productions of knowledge through productions of space, but one which has been accorded far less critical attention: *the modalities through which the routes described by travellers shape their descriptions of those routes*. I propose to map this journey between topographicalization and textualization in ways that not only fold these spaces into and out of one another but also set them in motion. By this I mean something more than the ‘general mobilisation of the world’ that LATOUR (1987, 228) illuminates in his lapidary discussion of ‘immutable and combinable mobiles’, the sketches, the graphs, the charts, and the specimens that circulate through networks of contact and connection.⁹⁾ Like LATOUR, I am interested in the ways in which spaces and times are produced inside these networks, but I want to recover the ways in which these time-spaces are folded into and thus shape – literally ‘form’ – what, following THRIFT (1996), I call spatial formations of knowledge.

My attempt to do so is inevitably complicated (even compromised) by the displacements that intervened between travellers' lines of flight and their multiple sites of writing and re-writing. Travel texts are typically heteroclite, and there are significant differences between notes hastily jotted down in transit, journal entries made from those notes at a camp-site or way-station, letters drawn from those entries and despatched for a domestic audience, and chapters composed from all these sources on the author's return home. But these various texts all carry within themselves their own formative geographies: they are *events* that enact, that gather into themselves, the compound spatialities of experience, encounter and representation (DUNCAN a. GREGORY 1999, 3–5). In what follows, I sketch out three tropic figures – three topo-logies/graphies of travel and travel-writing – that enter into spatial formations of knowledge. Following Deleuze more loosely than I expect purists would wish, these three figures are: a *rhizomatic* space (a complex space with no centre); a *labyrinthine* space (a complex space with a centre); and a *striated* space (an ordered, linear space). This is not a complete inventory; there are other figures. But it is important to emphasise that none of them are stable geometries: they are all mobile spaces of practice, spaces-in-process and spaces-as-process (cf. DOEL 1999).

Tropicality, excess and rhizomatic spaces

'Epithet after epithet is found too weak to convey to those, who have not visited the intertropical regions, the sensation of delight which the mind experiences ... The land is one great wild, untidy, luxuriant hothouse, which nature made for her menagerie, but man has taken possession of it, and has studded it with gay houses and formal gardens. How great would be the desire in every admirer of nature to behold, if such were possible, another planet; yet to every one in Europe, it may truly be said, that at the distance of a few degrees from his native soil, the glories of another world are open to him.' (Charles Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*)

The imaginative geographies of the tropics cannot be reduced to a single image; the conceptual space of 'tropicality' has a complex genealogy. It includes the

Edenic islands of Cook's Pacific, the fecund luxuriance of Humboldt's Amazon and the listless menace of Conrad's Congo (ARNOLD 1996). I do not mean to imply that tropicality was always and everywhere conveyed by passages through rhizomatic spaces, therefore, but some traveller-writers contrived an intimate folding between the tangled world of tropical nature and the formal structures of their texts. Here I sketch the experiences of two of them, one at the dawn of the nineteenth century and the other at its close, one a man and the other a woman, one travelling in South America and the other in West Africa: Alexander von Humboldt and Mary Kingsley.

Humboldt and South America

'I am at present fit only to read Humboldt,' wrote Charles Darwin at Bahia, Argentina in 1832; 'he, like another Sun, illumines everything I behold' (BROWNE 1995, 212). One of the most forceful representations of his hero's odyssey through the Spanish American colonies between 1799 and 1804 is Edouard Ender's celebrated image painted long after HUMBOLDT and his companion Bonpland had completed their travels. It shows a radiant HUMBOLDT in the foreground, Darwin's Sun-king, surrounded by instruments, specimens and packing-chests, secure in a makeshift 'space of science' from which he and Bonpland are able to master – at least in an intellectual sense – the wild exuberance of tropical nature outside the hut, which in its turn threatens to overwhelm the tiny, indistinct figure of a native inhabitant in the background. Ender's rendering is consistent with the grand vision of HUMBOLDT's master-work, *Cosmos*, the first volume of which was published in 1845, and its systematic 'organization of the view', its ordering of the scene, reinscribes and reaffirms in a different register the sense in which Humboldt's own project was enframed and triangulated by the baselines of colonial Spanish power and his acute dependence on its missions, outposts and roads for his own 'organization of the view'. He sought to convert what he called 'the torrid zone' into a mappable space – the Space of Reason and the Space of Science inhabited by an ordered Nature – and his overviews and transects were drawn on the baselines of colonial power (DETTELBAACH 1996).

But when one reads HUMBOLDT's *Personal Narrative* it becomes clear that these traverses were not part of a pre-formed itinerary and that they were, on the contrary, tactical forays, improvisations and performances on the wing. The physical form of his journey was not a continuous trajectory but an episodic series of circuits

⁹ In this essay I do not consider 'sketches, charts and graphs' – still less specimens – all of which also enter into the visual economy of travel and the production of its knowledges. On the sketches and paintings produced by Enlightenment travellers and their successors, see STAFFORD (1984); on photography, see OSBORNE (2000) and GREGORY (in press). For a suggestive discussion of the spatial practices enrolled within the production of cartographic knowledges, see EDNEY (1997).

and transects.¹⁰⁾ In consequence his narrative was not (and could not be) a linear progression from darkness to light, but was punctuated instead by the traces of what he himself called his 'fugitive ideas' and his 'temporary collection of facts and first impressions.'¹¹⁾

In some passages HUMBOLDT produces an ordered 'nature' through the (canonical) invocation of both Reason and Spirit, thus:

'The site has something wild and tranquil, melancholic and attractive about it. In the midst of such powerful nature we felt nothing inside but peace and repose. In the solitude of these mountains I was less struck by the new impressions recorded at each step than by the fact that such diverse climates have so much in common. In the hills where the convent stands palm trees and tree fern grow; in the afternoon, before the rainfalls, the monotonous screaming of the howler monkeys seems like a distant wind in the forests. Despite these exotic sounds, and the strange plant forms and marvels of the New World, everywhere nature allows man to sense a voice speaking to him in familiar terms. The grass carpeting the ground, the old moss and ferns covering tree roots, the torrent that falls over steep calcareous rocks, the harmonious colours reflecting the water, the green and the sky, all evoke familiar sensations in the traveller.' (HUMBOLDT 1995, 109)¹²⁾

¹⁰⁾ Indeed, Humboldt was in South America largely by accident. He had originally intended to travel to the West Indies, but his plans were thrown into disarray by the Napoleonic war and the naval blockade of the western coast of Europe; he was then invited to join a private expedition to Egypt, but this too was scuttled by the Anglo-French conflict; Bougainville subsequently invited Humboldt to join him on a new voyage round the world, but the revolutionary government delayed the expedition because of the financial strain imposed by its ill-fated Egyptian campaign; finally, Humboldt's plan to sail to Algiers, travel across the Maghreb by caravan to Cairo, and then journey up the Nile in the wake of the French expeditionary force had to be abandoned when he and Bonpland were denied a visa as a result of rumours of a revolt in North Africa. Undeterred, they headed on foot across the Pyrenees to Barcelona and then to Madrid, where Humboldt was eventually granted permission to travel to the Spanish colonies in America.

¹¹⁾ There were other versions of Humboldt's travels, and DETTELBACH (1996, 261) attends most closely to those texts in which Humboldt presents 'the voyage of instruments not the exploits of the voyager' and hence produces 'the isothermal, isodynamic, isochronic space of a "physics of the earth", filled not with collections and descriptions but with measurements and instrument readings'. See also GODLEWSKA (1999).

¹²⁾ Cf. the spatial systematicity Humboldt produces in his famous graphical portrayal of vertical zonation: by this means, DETTELBACH (1996, 268) explains, 'in the tropics, global order becomes locally visible, precisely by condensing huge expanses of territory into a single vertical ascent ... [such that] global order is made locally visible.'

But in other passages 'nature' overwhelms these categories – 'wild nature' is registered as 'excess' – so that these rationalizations are confounded as the 'new' intrudes into and interrupts the 'known':

'When a traveller recently arrived from Europe steps into South American jungle for the first time he sees nature in a completely unexpected guise. The objects that surround him only faintly bring to mind those descriptions by famous writers of the banks of the Mississippi, of Florida, and of other temperate regions of the New World. With each step he feels not at the frontiers of the torrid zone but in its midst; not on one of the West Indian Islands but in a vast continent where everything is gigantic; mountains, rivers, and the masses of plants. If he is able to feel the beauty of landscape, he will find it hard to analyse his many impressions. He does not know what shocks him more: whether the calm silence of the solitude, or the beauty of the diverse, contrasting objects, or that fullness and freshness of plant life in the Tropics. It could be said that the earth, overloaded with plants, does not have sufficient space to develop ... The same lianas that trail along the ground climb up to the tree-tops, swinging from one tree to another 100 feet up in the air. As these parasitical plants form a real tangle, a botanist often confuses flowers, fruit and leaves belonging to different species.' (HUMBOLDT 1995, 83).

These are revealing passages because each includes and seeks to contain the other. In the first passage HUMBOLDT begins by acknowledging 'the new impressions recorded at each step' only to have them overwritten by the swelling insistence on familiarity, harmony, order. Conversely, the second passage opens with the unpreparedness of the traveller 'recently arrived from Europe' and encountering the South American rain-forest 'for the first time', but these temporary perplexities are engulfed by the persistent overfullness of this exotic nature. This oscillating movement is, I think, significant. Describing his own foray into the Amazon with a scientific expedition two hundred years after HUMBOLDT, LATOUR (1999, 30) claims to be following the trail of a 'weak discipline that will, before my eyes, take its first steps, just as I would have been able to observe the teeterings and totterings of geography had I, in past centuries, run through Brazil after Jussieu or Humboldt.' But this is to allow his 'circulating reference' – the practices of scientific articulation – too smooth and striated a passage. For in HUMBOLDT's narrative one response does *not* superimpose itself over the other, and these 'tangles' and 'labyrinths' are *not* progressively replaced by ordered, delimited spaces: these moments jostle and confound one another to produce – to 'geo-graph' – what I am calling a rhizomatic space. By this means the tropics were produced not as what PRATT (1992, 120) calls:

'the accessible, collectible, categorizable nature of the Linnaeans, but [as] a dramatic, extraordinary nature, a spectacle

capable of overwhelming human knowledge and understanding. Not a nature that sits waiting to be known and possessed, but a nature in motion, powered by life forces many of which are invisible to the human eye; a nature that dwarfs humans, commands their being, arouses their passions, defies their powers of perception.¹³

And yet I must pause here too. Although there is much in PRATT's characterization with which I agree, I do not think HUMBOLDT's 'nature' can be reduced to 'nature-as-spectacle'. The possibility of seeing 'nature in motion' is itself the *product* of motion: HUMBOLDT is not confronted by an unmappable space of the sublime before which Humboldt-as-spectator is forcibly reminded of his 'dwarfish inability to know'. If HUMBOLDT's is an ideology of the aesthetic, as my repetition of EAGLETON's (1990) remark implies and as DETTELBAACH (1996) and others have so persuasively argued, it is often – and always in these moments of undecidability and unrepresentability – an ideology of *immersion* not contemplation produced through a *haptic* rather than a purely optical imaginary in which the eyes function as organs of touch. The senses are confounded because they are compounded: 'Because haptic visuality draws upon other senses, the viewer's body is more obviously involved in the process of seeing than is the case with optical visuality' (MARKS 1998, 332). And this sense of physical engagement, of corporeal immersion, works to interrupt the optical detachment, the disembodied gaze privileged by the enframed totalities of Science. Humboldt's marked reluctance to publish his *Personal narrative* is well-known, but this is symptomatic not of any contradiction between his aesthetics and his science – these are fully congruent – but rather of the ways in which the traces of HUMBOLDT's physical encounter with tropical nature, his 'body-memory' of its sensuous co-construction, could not be erased by the clinical protocols of Science.

Kingsley and West Africa

MARY KINGSLEY's *Travels through West Africa* describes two journeys, one made between August 1893 and January 1894 and the other made between December 1894 and November 1895.¹³ Like HUMBOLDT, her journeys were contained, at least in part, by the base-

lines of colonial power, since KINGSLEY travelled within the integuments of a French colonial apparatus (its officials and missions) and the network of a British trading company (its agents and posts). In KINGSLEY's account science functions as a far more explicit counter-narrative than in HUMBOLDT's text, because even though she was armed with advice and instructions from a Cambridge don, Henry Guillemard, she adopted an ironic attitude to the very possibility of her producing nominally scientific knowledge.

'I am always getting myself mixed ... in my attempts "to contemplate phenomena from a scientific standpoint", as Cambridge ordered me to do. I'll give up the habit. "You can't do that sort of thing out here ..."' (KINGSLEY 1986, 141).

Commentators whose work I admire have made much of the way in which, in these and other registers, KINGSLEY's gender seems to have inflected her travel-writing in the masculinist world of late Victorian exploration and science (BLUNT 1994; MILLS 1991). But, as her own remark implies, what seemed perfectly possible from the comfort of a Cambridge study often turned out to be thoroughly impractical and even undesirable 'out here', and I want to suggest that the relations between Kingsley's gender and text were mediated by the spatial form of her journey.

If HUMBOLDT's travels were improvisational by necessity, KINGSLEY's seem to have been so by design. Her writings convey a sense of her going to West Africa not in order to get *to* somewhere – for much of the time she travels without a particular destination in mind, a coherent route or a set objective – but of her going in order to *be* there. She is constantly on the move, constructing herself as what LAWRENCE (1994, 147) perceptively calls 'a mobile, improvisational trader on the market', following her own fancy and even the whims of the landscape, relishing her freedom after years of being closeted within the family home. "Go and learn your tropics," said Science [Guillemard], she wrote in her opening chapter: and promptly wondered where on earth she was to go (KINGSLEY 1986, 1). And her way of 'learning the tropics' was as errant – topographically and textually – as this opening sally implied. Here she is giving what she calls 'a brief notice of the manners, habits and customs of West Coast rivers' and of her own 'fooling about' in the mangrove swamps fringing the coast:

'Excepting the Congo, the really great river comes out to sea with as much mystery as possible; lounging lazily along among its mangrove swamps in a what's-it-matter-when-one-comes-out and where's-the-hurry style ... At high-water you do not see the mangroves displaying their ankles in the way that shocked Captain Lugard. They look most respectable, their foliage rising densely in a wall ... Banks indeed at high

¹³ KINGSLEY (1986); see also FRANK (1986). *Travels* is, as LAWRENCE (1994, 141) remarks, a hybrid text: a "word swamp", as [Kingsley] called it, of narrative, diary, ethnographic facts and stories quoted from African and European sources: The published text was based on Kingsley's diaries and letters home, and was edited by Henry Guillemard. See BLUNT (1994, 62–63).

water can hardly be said to exist, the water stretching away into the mangrove swamps for miles and miles, and you can then go, in a suitable small canoe, away among these swamps as far as you please. This is a fascinating pursuit. For people who like that sort of thing it is just the sort of thing they like.' (KINGSLEY 1986, 87–89).

Or again:

'Before you are ... far [up-river], great, broad, business-like-looking river entrances open on either side, showing wide rivers, mangrove-walled, but two-thirds of them are utter frauds which will ground you within half an hour of your entry into them ... But I need not here go into further particulars regarding the discovery of the connection between the Niger and its delta. It is just the usual bad ju-ju of all big African rivers.' (KINGSLEY 1986, 94–95).

If KINGSLEY is indeed 'the joker in the pack' of Victorian women explorers, as MIDDLETON (1965) once described her, then in this and many other passages she is moving through a trickster landscape which, through her anthropomorphizations ('manners, habits and customs', 'bad ju-ju', and the rest) is imbued with its own unpredictable agency.¹⁴ Here is KINGSLEY describing her dogged pursuit of what she calls 'a wayward path'. She congratulates herself on crossing a stream by crawling across a log and making it safely to the road, only to find that the path

'then and there turns round and goes back to the stream again higher up – evidently a joke, "thought-you-were-going-to-get-home-dry-did-you" sort of thing. Wade the stream, rejoin the road on the hither side. Then the precious thing makes a deliberate bolt for the interior of Africa, instead of keeping on going to Libreville ...

'[I] continue along my old tormentor, which now attempts to reassure me by doubling round to the left and setting off again for Libreville. I am not deceived, I have had my trust in it too seriously tampered with – Yes, it's up to mischief again, and it turns itself into a stream. Nothing for it but wading, so wade; but what will be its next manifestation, I wonder?' (KINGSLEY 1986, 119).

In fact, KINGSLEY always seems to be following a wayward path, and by this means always manages to find unexpected openings through which – rather like Alice – she moves on to new terrains and new situations. These twists and turns make it impossible for her to order her prose or her passage through the landscape

by conventional scientific means. Its categorizations have little or no practical purchase on her travels: 'One by one I took my old ideas derived from books,' she admits, 'and weighed them against the real life around me, and found them either worthless or wanting.' (KINGSLEY 1986).¹⁵ For the same reason, her spaces cannot be fixed. This is more than the product of what she calls 'topographical confusion' induced by the shortcomings of her charts, the difficulties of naming

¹⁵ This was true of 'nature' – '[T]he study of natural phenomena knocks the bottom out of any man's conceit if it is done honestly and not by selecting only those facts that fit in with his pre-conceived or ingrafted notions' (p. 441) – but it was also true of 'culture'. In a revealing passage KINGSLEY comments on the difficulty of finding the appropriate terms in which to understand what she calls 'the African point of view': 'The difficult of the language is ... far less than the whole set of difficulties with your own mind. Unless you can make it pliant enough to follow the African idea step by step, however much care you may take, you will not bag your game. I heard an account the other day ... of a representative of her Majesty in Africa who went out for a day's antelope shooting. There were plenty of antelope about, and he stalked them with great care; but always, just before he got within shot of the game, they saw something and bolted. Knowing he and the boy behind him had been making no sound and could not have been seen, he stalked on, but always with the same result; until happening to look round, he saw the boy behind him was supporting the dignity of the Empire at large, and this representative of it in particular, by steadfastly holding aloft the consular flag. Well, if you go hunting the African idea with the flag of your own religion or opinions floating ostentatiously over you, you will similarly get a very poor bag' (p. 435). KINGSLEY's (1986) cautions about preconceptions and 'old ideas' are well-taken, but the fact that she chooses to advance them by toying with the masculinist metaphor of hunting – 'stalking the savage idea' (p. 440) – shows that, even as she was under the spell of the African landscape, she also felt the pull of European science and its particular optics, appropriations and rationalities. On the 'instability' of her text, see MILLS (1991) and BLUNT (1994, 72–80).

¹⁶ None of her native informants 'seem to recognise a single blessed name on the chart', she notes at one point. 'Geographical research in this region is fraught with difficulty, I find, owing to different tribes calling one and the same place by different names.' Furthermore, 'to make topographical confusion worse compounded, [they] call a river by one name when you are going up it, and by another name when you are coming down.' (KINGSLEY 1986, 237, 245). But these different language-games make perfect sense within their own horizons of meaning; they are all produced within localized fields of social practice and simply cannot be convened within the plenary space of abstraction that is the conventional map.

¹⁴ McEWAN (1996) notes that when Kingsley 'allowed the landscapes to exercise their almost magical powers on her' and, in particular, when she filled her accounts of the forest with 'animism and pantheism', she was trading on indigenous knowledges and disclosing the vital part played by her native guides in the production of her geographies. This is, I think, perceptive; yet in this passage, where she invokes the 'manners and customs' trope, Kingsley is also establishing a distance between herself and those local knowledges and providing a gloss on them.

and the lacunae in the local knowledge of her native companions.¹⁶ These spaces are produced through the labile exigencies of travel that cannot be captured within the abstracted spaces and invariant metrics of a standard cartography. She explains:

'When a person is out travelling, intent mainly on geography, it is necessary, if he publishes his journals, that he should publish them in sequence. But I am not a geographer. I have to learn the geography of a region I go into in great detail, so as to get about; but my means of learning it are not the scientific ones – Taking observations, Surveying, Fixing points, &c., &c. These things I know not how to do. I do not take "lunars"...' (KINGSLEY 1986, 101).¹⁷

Indeed, she jokes that she finds such a practice 'un-wholesome', and explains that 'this being my point of view regarding geography, I have relegated it to a separate chapter, and have dealt similarly with Trade and Fetish.' As this aside indicates, the disciplines of science do impose themselves on her from time to time. And yet, when she explains that she has relegated her discussion of 'fetish' to a separate chapter – in fact, several chapters – 'owing to its unfitness to be allowed to stray about in the rest of the text, in order to make things generally tidier', she immediately reverts to the sheer impossibility of a tidy prose:

'The state of confusion the mind of a collector gets into on the West Coast is something simply awful, and my notes for a day will contain facts relating to the kraw-kraw, price of onions, size and number of fish caught, cooking recipes, genealogies, oaths (native form of), law cases, and market prices, &c. And the undertaking of tidying these things up is no small one.' (KINGSLEY 1986, 73).

This is not to say that KINGSLEY's prose is disordered. And there are sections in which she does make some attempt at 'tidying things up'. So, for example, she offers a 'general résumé' of the geography of the Ogowé region precisely because her own journals 'kept while in it contain this information in so scattered a state that no one save an expert in this bit of Africa would understand the full meaning of them.' And her

extended discussions of 'fetish' similarly strive for a certain systematicity (KINGSLEY 1986, 353). But for the most part her ordering is rarely achieved through an optical imaginary – at one point she suggests that to be in the African rainforest 'is like being shut up in a library whose books you cannot read' (KINGSLEY 1986, 102) – but rather through a haptic imaginary that inscribes a vivid, thoroughly sensuous corporeality with its own, intensely mobile harmonies. This is evident from her general appropriations of landscape:

'Doubtless it is wrong to call it a symphony, yet I know no other word to describe the scenery of the Ogowé. It is as full of life and beauty and passion as any symphony Beethoven ever wrote: the parts changing, interweaving, and returning. There are *leit motifs* here in it too. See the papyrus ahead; and you know when you get abreast of it you will find the great forest sweeping away in a bay-like curve behind it against the dull gray sky...' (KINGSLEY 1986, 129–130).

And it is still more apparent in her much closer engagements with the particularities of this acutely physical world where, again, order emerges out of her practical, densely corporeal encounters:

'On first entering the great grim twilight regions of the forest you hardly see anything but the vast column-like grey tree stems in their countless thousands around you, and the sparsely vegetated ground beneath. But day by day, as you get trained to your surroundings, you see more and more, and a whole world grows up gradually out of the gloom before your eyes... It is the same with the better lit regions, where vegetation is many-formed and luxuriant. As you get used to it, what seemed at first to be an inextricable tangle ceases to be so. The separate sorts of plants stand out before your eyes with ever increasing clearness, until you can pick out the one particular one you may want; and daily you find it easier to make your way through what looked at first an impenetrable wall, for you have learnt that it is in the end easier to worm your way in among networks of creepers, than to shirk these, and go for the softer walls of climbing grasses and curtains of lycopodium ...' (KINGSLEY 1986, 103).

The sense of seeing-and-touching, even seeing-by-touching is unmistakable. In much the same way, KINGSLEY's passage through the landscape is marked by her episodic immersion in it, her (wayward) path registered through her body. Here she is wading through the mangrove swamps, taking her turn in leading the party:

'Sometimes the leader of the party would make three or four attempts before he found a ford, going on until the black, batter-like ooze came up round his neck, and then turning back and trying in another place; while the rest of the party sat on the bank ... If I happened to be in front, the duty of finding a ford fell on me ... I was too frightened of the Fan, and too nervous and uncertain of the stuff my other men were made of, to dare show the white feather at anything that turned up. The Fan took my conduct as a matter of course, never having travelled with white men before, or learnt the

¹⁷ MCEWAN (1996, 75) claims that for Kingsley West Africa 'was not a homogeneous confusion of nature, but a series of ordered physical environments – coastal, riverine, montane and forest' – and that her accounts fastened on 'evidence of natural order rather than pandemonium.' Much depends on how 'natural order' in that sentence is construed, however, for there is more than one kind of order, or rather 'ordering', and Kingsley's sense of it was organic and profoundly physical. I have more sympathy with LAWRENCE (1994, 141–143) when she elaborates Kingsley's sceptical attitude towards the abstract orderings of Science, thus: 'Her narrative tries to retain the foreignness of Africa not as Conradian mystique but as the stubborn resistance of the specific, the local.'

way some of them require carrying over swamps and rivers and so on.' (KINGSLEY 1986, 276).¹⁸⁾

Sometimes the scene literally explodes around her. So, for example, she returns to Kangwe by an unfamiliar route, and tries to circumnavigate a native village by climbing 'quietly up into the forest on the steep hillside' above the village.

'There was no sort of path up there, and going through a clump of shenja, I slipped, slid and finally fell plump through the roof of an unprotected hut. What the unfortunate inhabitants were doing, I don't know, but I am pretty sure they were not expecting me to drop in, and a scene of great confusion occurred.' (KINGSLEY 1986, 134).

Other adventures have a similar physical force – most famously when she falls into a game-pit and realises 'the blessings of a good thick skirt' (KINGSLEY 1986, 270) – and again when she traverses the rapids of the Ogowé or forces her way through the mangroves. Indeed, when she makes use of a half-submerged tree trunk to cross a swamp she says she was 'hurled off by that inexorable fate that demands of me a personal acquaintance with fluvial and paludial ground deposits.' These eruptions work to blunt the powers of abstraction vested in Science: suddenly submerged in the swamp, 'I really cannot be expected,' she gasps, even 'by the most exigent of scientific friends, to go botanising under water without a proper outfit.' (KINGSLEY 1986, 301).

Throughout her writings, KINGSLEY insists on the capacity of Africa to startle; her travels unsettled established preconceptions and protocols:

'But there! it's Africa all over; presenting one with familiar objects when one least requires them, like that razor in the heart of Gorilla-land; and unfamiliar, such as elephants and buffaloes when you are out for a quiet stroll armed with a butterfly net, to say nothing of snakes in one's bed and scorpions in one's boots and sponge. One's view of life gets quite distorted ...' (KINGSLEY 1986, 399).

What was being 'distorted', I suggest, was the hegemonic 'view of life' – what might be called, after

Timothy Mitchell, 'the world-as-exhibition' – that required an unambiguous separation between observer and object, and between Europe and its Other(s). Just as KINGSLEY's travels in West Africa compressed those distances (while never altogether erasing them), so her *Travels in West Africa* confounded them too.¹⁹⁾

Orientalism, disclosure and labyrinthine spaces

'One feels as if he were in a masquerade; the part of the world which is really most important – womankind – appears to him only in shadow and flitting phantoms. What danger is he in from these wrapped and veiled figures which glide by, shooting him with a dark and perhaps wicked eye; what peril is he in as he slips through these narrow streets with their masked batteries of latticed windows! This Eastern life is all open to the sun; and yet how little of its secrets does the stranger fathom. I seem to feel, always, in an Eastern town, that there is a mask of duplicity and concealment behind which the Orientals live; that they habitually deceive the traveller in his "gropings after truth".' (Charles Dudley Warner, *Mummies and Moslems*).

By the eighteenth century modern European cultures of travel had long valorized objects that in various ways resisted cultural appropriation. Objects whose accessibility was limited by virtue of distance or difference exercised a particular fascination because to establish a relationship with them was to exceed the limits of the ordinary, an act of transgression that could be as dangerous as it was seductive. Even within the confines of the elaborately scripted Grand Tour, its climax – Italy – was often constructed as a site of excess and extravagance. And although these cultural shocks were tempered by a rhetoric of familiarity in which Italy was portrayed as the locus of a classical antiquity that was visible in the landscape and legible through canonical texts, it still had the capacity to captivate, intrigue and even unsettle travellers from the North.²⁰⁾ Venice in

¹⁸⁾ It is necessary to notice KINGSLEY's (1986, 171) own sense of her progress as a performance, thus: 'Some good souls helped the men haul [the canoe], while I did my best to amuse the others by diving headlong from a large rock on to which I had elaborately climbed, into a thick clump of willow-leaved shrubs. They applauded my performance vociferously, and then assisted my efforts to extricate myself, and during the rest of my scramble they kept close to me, with keen competition for the front row, in hopes that I would do something like it again. But I refused the encore, because, bashful as I am, I could not but feel that my last performance was carried out with all the superb reckless abandon of a Sarah Bernhardt, and a display of art of this order should satisfy any African village for a year at least'.

¹⁹⁾ Only in Kingsley's ascent of Mount Cameroon is there any sustained attempt to produce what PRATT (1992, 201) calls 'the monarch-of-all-I-survey' scene characteristic of both imperial stylistics and masculinist science. While Kingsley does enjoy, from time to time, 'an uninterrupted panoramic view' (p. 565), even 'a noble view' (p. 576), her account is largely a record of her *failure* to survey. Her attempts to do so were persistently undermined by torrential rain and by trails of white mist whose advance through her field of vision Kingsley, once again, conveys in thoroughly tactile, haptic terms.

²⁰⁾ The complexity of this imaginative topography bears emphasis, and it overlaps with Italy's place within a geography of (homo)sexualities: on the distance between the closet and Capri, so to speak, see ALDRICH (1993).

particular was seen as what Henry James called 'the refuge of endless strange secrets'; the very form of the city, configured as an elaborate labyrinth of canals and alleys, conspired with its ambiguous location between the Terra Firma and the sea to confer an aura of serpentine mystery:

'But close about the quays and churches, palaces and prisons: sucking at their walls, and welling up into the secret places of the town: crept the water always. Noiseless and watchful: coiled round and round it, in its many folds, like an old serpent ...' (DICKENS 1998, 84–85).

It was within the discursive field of Orientalism, however, that these cultures of travel invested most lavishly in those other cultures that resisted appropriation by seeking to 'unveil' the mystery that was secreted at their centre: by mapping what I am calling their labyrinthine spaces in a process of othering-through-ordering. There are, of course, multiple Orientalisms and many different 'Orients' (SAID 1995; LOWE 1991). And, as I have implied, the topos of the labyrinth is not uniquely associated with its constructions: it appears in many other imaginative geographies too, perhaps most tellingly in Walter Benjamin's descriptions of Paris, 'the capital of the nineteenth century', where his figuration of the city is repeated in the convoluted architecture of his Arcades project wherein the space of the one is folded into and out of the space of the other. But there is a significant difference. Benjamin's successive acts of folding and unfolding are moments in a critical practice that attempts to unmask the commodity culture of capitalism and to expose, through an analytical traverse of the 'mythological topography' of Paris, the latent mythology of a ruined modernity.²¹ Within nineteenth-century Orientalism, however, where the 'Oriental' city and its attendant cultures are commonly described as a labyrinth, an Ariadne's thread is woven into and out of an 'epistemology of the veil' that, as I now want to show, seeks another object of disclosure altogether. In order to do so, I shall focus on the writings of English travellers in Egypt in the nineteenth century.

The epistemology of the veil

By the nineteenth century it had become commonplace for travellers and writers to describe Cairo as the

quintessential 'Oriental' city, and the labyrinth was one of the most common topological figures used to convey its alien form to European and American readers. This concept-metaphor redoubled its force in the closing decades of the century, when the slow and stuttering construction of Ismail's 'Paris-on-the-Nile', a new quarter of modern hotels and wide boulevards, threw the 'traditional' city into relief. Within its precincts 'there are no names of streets put up,' complained one writer in 1882, 'or any numbers to the houses, and it is consequently a work of time to find any house you want.' More than this, as another remarked, 'the houses are built without order; there are no regular streets and each man seems to have placed his house where his fancy led him, regardless of order.' The result was a 'confusion of houses', with 'shops, mosques, dwellings, all jumbled up together anyhow; courtyards leading into other courtyards with yet others beyond forming a bewildering maze.' For precisely these reasons TRAILL (1896) could think of no other city where it was possible to 'become hopelessly *désorienté* with so little trouble' in what he called its 'magic labyrinth of winding ways.' This strange topology was read as the essential geometry of the Orient: 'Only in Cairo,' wrote JOUBERT (1894, 16), 'did I feel the real sensation of the Orient in the middle of this maze of streets.'

That 'sensation' was by turns intoxicating and intriguing, but the sense of being on the edge of the unknown was often spiced with a *frisson* of fear. Here is MONTBARD (1894), describing the experience of one party of European visitors to Cairo:

'They turned the corner of a street, and suddenly passed into the deep obscurity of the narrow alleys, bordered by lofty houses, where the succession of corbels, of balconies, of moucharabiehs rose up in flights along the walls, hardly leaving space right at the top for one to perceive a square of the heavens sprinkled with stars. A few rare lamps lit up, with their dying and indistinct light, the capricious arabesques, delicately picked out, that adorned the wooden casing of monumental doors, before which swung stuffed crocodiles and hippopotami.

'Strange shadows glided silently by; great thin cats brushed against their legs or slid along the walls; vague forms disappeared in gaping apertures; their footsteps, muffled by a thick coating of dust, made no sound; they barely heard, like an indistinct murmur, the hum of the stirring street they had quitted, which a vaporous glimmer of light indicated in the distance.

'They were stranded in blind alleys, frightful passages without egress, amid houses that had tumbled in, where the quivering beams, suspended in space, threatened at each instant to fall down on their heads. They groped about on the rubbish, stumbled among the ruins, climbed over heaps of stones, avoided the sinister openings of caved-in cellars.' (MONTBARD 1894, 128).

²¹ On Benjamin and the labyrinth, see FRISBY (1985, 207–263); GILLOCH (1996, 67–78). For Benjamin the labyrinth was both metaphor and method.

In passages like these the imaginary Orient in what SECOR (1999, 385) calls 'all its unknowable irregularity' is inscribed – literally made visible through – the physical irregularity of its streets and the phantom-like figures that appear and disappear within them. And yet, as MONTBARD's attempt to render these spaces visible shows, Europeans insisted that it *was* possible to know the Orient, that it *was* possible to uncover the secret at the heart of its labyrinth. The pervasive image of the Orient as both maze and mystery was central to the Orientalist project of disclosure, and it derived much of its power from the *Arabian Nights Tales*, which were widely supposed to have been set in Cairo. These stories – in their nursery-versions and in their unexpurgated forms – provided foreign travel-writers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with an endless stream of images with which to conjure up the 'traditional' city and its ways of life as a space of fantasy and unReason (GREGORY forthc. a). But equally significant was the locus from which the tales were supposed to have been told by Sheherezad – the harem – because this framing narrative helped to establish the Orient as elaborately feminized, its resolution as endlessly deferred, and its spaces as multiple and magical.

It was in order to render those intricate spaces transparent – to lay the Orient bare and open it to the masculinist gaze – that Orientalism made use of an 'epistemology of the veil'. LANE's (1827) description of his arrival at Alexandria in September 1825 provides a first approximation:

'As I approached the shore, I felt like an Eastern bridegroom, about to lift up the veil of his bride, and to see for the first time the features which were to charm or disappoint or disgust him. I was not visiting Egypt merely as a traveller to examine its pyramids and temples and grottoes, and after satisfying my curiosity to quit it for other scenes and other pleasures: but I was about to throw myself entirely among strangers, to adopt their language, their customs and dress, and, in associating almost exclusively with the natives, to prosecute the study of their literature. My feelings, therefore, on that occasion partook too much of anxiety to be very pleasing.' (LANE 1827, f5).

LANE's²²⁾ epistemological project of 'unveiling' the Orient activates an erotics of knowledge that turns on both anticipation and anxiety. Indeed, YEGENOGLU (1998) describes the veil as 'one of those tropes through which Western fantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient and access to the interiority of the other are fantasmatically achieved.' But she insists that there is much more involved than the deployment of a

simple metaphor. To the European viewing subject, she argues,

'The veiled woman is not simply an obstacle in the field of visibility and control, but her veiled presence also seems to provide the Western subject with a condition which is the inverse of Bentham's omnipotent gaze. The loss of control does not imply a mere loss of sight, but a complete reversal of positions: her body completely invisible to the European observer except for her eyes, *the veiled woman can see without being seen*' (YEGENOGLU 1998, 39; 43).

Hence, so she says, there is an ineradicable instability at the very centre of Orientalist epistemology. The viewing subject's active desire to know, to possess the Orient as an object of knowledge – LANE's fever of anticipation in the passage above – hides a fear of disappointment and deception: LANE's avowed 'anxiety'. As YEGENOGLU (1998, 47–48) suggests, this proliferating relation is elaborated across the discursive field of Orientalism as a synecdoche for 'the Orient itself':

'The reference of the veil thus exceeds its sartorial matter, it is in everything that is Oriental or Muslim. The Western eye sees it everywhere, in all aspects of the other's life. It covers and hides every single Oriental thing that the Western subject wants to gaze at and possess; it stands in the way of his desire for transparency and penetration. Writing on Cairo, Nerval observes that "the town itself, like those who dwell in it, unveils its most shady retreats, its most delightful interiors, only by degrees." In the Orientalist chain of signification, the veil signifies not only (Oriental) woman but also the Orient itself ...

'In Western eyes the Orient is always *more and other* than what it appears to be, for it always and everywhere appears in a veiled, disguised and deceptive manner. It is by way of its veiled appearance, by the very act of its concealment, that the Orient reveals itself, reveals that there is Orient, a place, a culture, an essence, that needs to be grasped, known and apprehended. But precisely because this essence is grasped "in" and "as" concealment, the essence *as essence* is never grasped. One always misses it – the veil is that curtain which simultaneously conceals and reveals; it conceals the Orient's truth and at the same time reveals its mode of existence, its very being – a being which always exists in a disguised and deceptive manner, a being which exists only behind its veil.'

As LANE's introduction to his manuscript also shows, however, the European observer was often 'veiled' too. Like many other European visitors, Lane adopted Arab dress, and with it the freedom of the veil – the freedom to see without being seen – which sustained Orientalism's own epistemology of the veil (cf. AHMED 1978, 95). As I now want to show, the production of knowledge under its sign often involved the co-production of a labyrinthine geography, and I will indicate something of its complexity by following the path of LANE's sister, SOPHIA POOLE, who went to live with him and his wife in Cairo during his third period of residence there between 1842 and 1844.

²²⁾ For a biography of LANE, see AHMED (1978).

Sophia Poole and the epistolary labyrinth

POOLE's (1844, 140) first impressions of Cairo were conventional enough: 'My ideas of it, for a considerable time, were very confused; it seemed to me, for the most part, a *labyrinth* of ruined and half-ruined houses.' In the course of her stay, however, those 'confusions' were clarified as she wove the labyrinth into her text. This process took place partly through the editorial agency of her brother, who placed his notes at her disposal so that she might devise a series of letters which the pair intended to publish as "Letters from an English Harem in Egypt":

'The opportunities I might enjoy of obtaining an insight into the mode of life of the higher classes of the ladies in this country, and of seeing many things highly interesting in themselves, and rendered more so by their being accessible only to a lady, suggested to him the idea that I might both gratify my own curiosity and collect much information of a novel and interesting nature, which he proposed I should embody in a series of familiar letters to a friend. To encourage me to attempt this latter object, he placed at my disposal a large collection of his own unpublished notes, that I might extract from them, and insert in my letters whatever I might think fit; and in order that I might record my impressions and observations with less restraint than I should experience if always feeling that I was writing for the press, he promised me that he would select those letters which he should esteem suitable for publication, and mark them to be copied.' (POOLE, 1844, I, v-vi).²³

In adopting the epistolary form POOLE was following a convention that was particularly common among female travellers, and which was in marked contrast to the more masculine scientific-taxonomic form of her brother's *Manners and customs of the modern Egyptians*. LANE himself had only been able to offer a second-hand account of the harem, of course, but his sister's ability to penetrate its interior – and, by pantographic extension, the interior of 'the Orient' itself – offered an unusual opportunity to furnish a first-hand account:

'My brother's account of the harem, and all that he has written respecting the manners and customs of the women of this country, I have found to be not only minutely accurate, but of the utmost value to me in preparing me for the life which I am now leading. His information, however, on these subjects being derived only from other men, is, of course, imperfect; and he has anxiously desired that I should supply its deficiencies, both by my own personal observation and by learning as much as possible of the state and morals of the women, and of the manner in which they are treated, from their own mouths.' (POOLE 1844, II, 94).²⁴

While POOLE's letters outwardly privilege her brother's description, and can thus be read as a *supplement* to his text, 'supplying its deficiencies' as she put it, I think it is misleading to suppose that her own contribution was not 'an essential part of the Orientalist plenitude' (YEGENOGLU 1998, 76–77). Such a reading overlooks the strategic location of the harem within the Orientalist imaginary, where it was so often a pivotal site of fantasy and desire: a locus made all the more fantasmatic by virtue of its inaccessibility to the gaze of the male traveller.²⁵

That said, there is an ambivalence in POOLE's account which is occasioned in part by the oscillation between her own writing and that of her brother; but it is also brought about, so I want to suggest, by the instability contained in their working title – 'an English Harem' – and, closely connected to the passage between these two spaces, by the spatial form of POOLE's traverses through Cairo which are folded into the topology of her correspondence. Her letters trace an arabesque from the banks of the Nile into the city; from one ('haunted') house, which she shared with her brother, to another; from the exterior of the mosques to their interiors; and, climactically, from the harem to the *hammam* (bath). These are discontinuous moves, some of

²³ The published text is thus a hybrid, the epistolary form conventional and the 'recipient' (always referred to as 'My dear friend') presumably imaginary. Even so, some of the consequences of conducting a correspondence are carried over into POOLE's text, including elements of the performative dimension: for a succinct discussion of these elements in the eighteenth-century familiar letter, see LOWENTHAL (1994, 14–34). Her remarks about the physicality of letter-writing and the transactional performances between writer and recipient do not apply to POOLE's imaginary correspondence, of course, but the emphasis she places on the 'writing of the self' in both time and space – on the situated geography of self-formation – is surely highly appropriate.

²⁴ More generally, she explained that it was not her intention to make 'many remarks on the manners and customs of the male portion of the people, my brother having written so full a description of them' (p. 15). For her brother's account of the harem, see LANE (1973, 175–191); on the form of LANE's text, see SAID (1995, 159–164) and for a critique, see RODENBECK (1998).

²⁵ In a reading which parallels and (I think) interrupts YEGENOGLU's concerns about the supplementarity of Poole's account, APTER (1999, 103) describes the harem in these terms: 'Similar to the veil (*hidjâb*, "curtain", "that which hides"), a shield or carapace ensuring that a layer of domestic interiority remains stuck on or wrapped around the female body even when it is exposed to public view, the harem, like the metaphorical skin of a building, is a kind of inside on the outside, a *concentrate of interiorized interiority*, a miniaturized version of the Casbah self-enclosed and circumscribed within the ... city'.

them the equivalent of 'blind alleys', but as she makes them Poole arcs ever closer to the heart of the labyrinth that was, for both her and her brother, the Orient.

As soon as she arrived at Cairo's port on the Nile, POOLE adopted Arab dress and, significantly, yoked this sartorial device to her interest in the harem:

'Imagine the face covered closely by a muslin veil, double at the upper part, the eyes only uncovered, and over a dress of coloured silk an overwhelming covering of black silk, extending, in my idea, in every direction; so that, having nothing free but my eyes, I looked with dismay at the high bank I must climb and the donkey I must mount, which was waiting for me at the summit. Nothing can be more awkward and uncomfortable than this riding dress; and if I had any chance of attaining my object without assuming it, I should never adopt it; but in English costume I should not gain admittance into many harems ...' (POOLE 1844, I, 63).

POOLE subsequently set out to visit the city's mosques, and here too, even as she explained the necessity of going in disguise to avoid 'the risk of being turned out of any mosque we might enter, and loaded with reproach and insult', she foreshadowed the ultimate object of her quest: 'An old friend of my brother's offered to take me if I would consent to ride after him in the streets and follow him in the mosques, and appear to be, for the time being, the chief lady of his harem.' (POOLE 1844, I, 156–157). She returned to this theme at the mosque of Sultan Hosein, crowded with women making their weekly visit to the Sultan's tomb: 'Never did a more submissive wife walk more meekly after her husband than I followed the steps of my governor *pro tempore*.' (POOLE 1844, I, 158).

Wearing the veil was always more than an imposture: it was also an epistemological gesture that pointed to the precarious passage POOLE had to negotiate between the two spaces rendered uneasily coincident in the image of an 'English Harem'. During her residence in Cairo POOLE accepted many of the cultural practices that went with the veil. Like the ladies of the high harems, peering through their lattice-work screens, many of her descriptions were views from windows. She referred to the quarters which she occupied with her children as 'the harem': 'the whole of the house, excepting the apartments of the ground-floor, [is] considered as the "harem".' (POOLE 1844, I, 70).²⁶ And she respected the spectatorial proscriptions on male visitors to its precincts:

'It is true, as you suppose, that I am sometimes amused at my position, and more particularly so, when, on the occasion of any thing heavy being brought into the hareem, one of the men passes through the passage belonging to it. Their approach is always announced by their saying audibly "O Protector!" ... and "Permission!" ... several times. Excepting on such occasions, no man approaches the hareem but the *sakka* or water-carrier ...

'The men are quite as careful in avoiding the hareem, as the ladies are in concealing their faces, and indeed in many cases more so. I have been amused particularly by the care of one of our men ... On one occasion, on returning home from riding with my boys, my donkey fairly threw me off as he entered the court; and when this man raised me up (for my head was on the ground) I supported myself for a moment with my hands against the wall of the house, while I assured my poor children, who were exceedingly frightened, that I was not hurt, forgetting that I was *showing my hands* not only to our own men, but to the men who attended the donkeys! I was immediately recalled to a consciousness of where I was, and of the impropriety of such an exposure, by the servant I have mentioned who most respectfully covered my hands with my *habarah*, and wrapped it around me so scrupulously that the men had not a second time the advantage of seeing a finger.' (POOLE 1844, II, 16–17).

Here POOLE momentarily gives way to 'amusement', reminding her readers that hers is an imposture, and yet 'immediately recalled to a consciousness of where I was', she recognises this as a condition of her access to 'truth'. It was simply not possible to derive an understanding of the Orient from the exterior: 'No person can imagine the strictness of the hareem without adopting its seclusion,' she explained, 'nor can a stranger form a just estimate of the degree of liberty [of women] without mixing in Eastern society.' (POOLE 1844, II, 17–18).

The epistemological gesture that sanctioned her conduct was a double one. In the first place, POOLE had no doubt that it was possible for a European to pass as an Egyptian. Her brother adopted Arab dress too, and when she noted that 'the Muslim salutation was often given to [him]', she said she mentioned this 'merely to show the fallacy of the opinion that the natives of the East can easily detect, even by a glance, a European in Oriental disguise' (POOLE 1844, I, 142). More than this: the very fact that Europeans in Arab dress were indeed other than they appeared, that they (too) were able to deceive people who passed them in the street or encountered them in the mosque, tacitly confirmed (by so starkly reversing its terms) the deception that enveloped the spectacle which Orientalism staged as 'the Orient'. In the second place, however, the fact that Europeans were able to participate so successfully in this masquerade – to don their own version of Warner's 'mask of duplicity and concealment' (above) – conferred upon

²⁶ It should be noted that the harem 'is not, *stricto sensu*, an architectural form, for it refers to a social rather than a physical configuration; it is a space made out of an assembly of women rather than a composition of historically coded orders, elevations or building types' (APTER 1999, 111). POOLE uses the term in this extended sense.

them the power to penetrate to the heart of the mystery that was the Orient while retaining their own sense of identity as a sovereign spectatorial subject. POOLE was no exception:

'In visiting those who are considered the noble of the land, I resume, under my Eastern riding costume, my English dress; thus avoiding the necessity of subjecting myself to any humiliation. In the Turkish in-door costume, the manner of my salutations must have been more submissive than I should have liked; while, as an Englishwoman, I am entertained by the most distinguished, not only as an equal but generally as a superior.' (POOLE 1844, I, 210).

That extraordinarily presumptive sense of being able to pass into and out of 'the Orient' at will – to enter the interior of the labyrinth while securing the exteriority of the European traveller – was a fundamental assumption of cultures of travel conducted under the sign of Orientalism.

POOLE's eventual 'initiation' into what she called the 'mysteries' of the harem was a two-stage process. Her first visit saw her navigate her way through the outer circles of the labyrinth (cf. APTER 1999, 104). Thus she travelled through the city to the house of the late governor of Cairo where she found that the apartments of the harem formed 'a separate and complete house'. She and her companion passed through a great gate which was closed by a large mat suspended before it, 'the curtain of the harem', that was 'raised by black eunuchs' (POOLE 1844, I, 209; 217).²⁷ They then crossed a courtyard and a spacious hall paved with marble. At the entrance of the first apartment POOLE was met by the elder daughter, who divested her of her riding-habit and conducted her to the divan where she was presented to her hostess. After sweetmeats, coffee and conversation, the visit concluded with a tour of the physical space of the harem. POOLE and her guide began in 'a magnificent room which was surrounded by divans; the elevated portion of the floor was covered with India matting, and in the middle of the depressed portion was the most tasteful fountain I have seen in Egypt, exquisitely inlaid with black, red and white marble.' They then proceeded through other rooms

and galleries, climbing higher into the house until they reached the bath. Significantly, they did not enter: 'the heat and vapour were so extremely oppressive in the region of the bath, that we merely looked into it, and gladly returned to the cool gallery' (POOLE 1844, I, 209–217). The abrupt termination of the visit – staying at the threshold of the bath – was a temporizing strategy. 'I am not surprised that you are curious on the subject of the bath and the Eastern manner of using it,' POOLE (1844, I, 216–217) consoled her fictional friend, and promised 'to devote a future letter to a description of the operation.'

For the time being, however, POOLE's descriptions of architecture and dress, reception and conversation worked to desexualize the harem: 'The employments of the hareem chiefly consist in embroidery on an oblong frame supported by four legs; but they extend to superintending the kitchen, and indeed the female slaves and servants generally; and often ladies of the highest distinction cook those dishes which are particularly preferred.' This was a way of 'exorcising Sheherezad', a common strategy in nineteenth-century travel writing, and at this stage of her itinerary POOLE was following the convention of ascribing an almost bourgeois domesticity to the harem (POOLE 1844, II, 27). Although she had some misgivings about what she saw – she could not pretend to 'defend the system of marrying blindfold' – in the main she pronounced herself pleased

'to find the Eastern women contented, and, without a single exception among my acquaintances, so cheerful, that I naturally conclude they are treated with consideration. The middle classes are at liberty to pay visits, and to go to the bath, when they please; but their fathers and husbands object to their shopping; therefore female brokers are in the frequent habit of attending the harems. The higher orders are more closely guarded, yet as this very circumstance is a mark of distinction, the women congratulate each other on this subject; and it is not uncommon for a husband to give his wife a pet name, expressive of her hidden charms, such as "the concealed jewel".' (POOLE 1844, II, 18).²⁸

These observations mirror those of her brother. Although LANE had noticed the domesticity of the harem, however, he had also criticized what he saw as the excessive 'indulgence of libidinous passion' that it permitted. He blamed the 'licentious' passions of the women on their husbands who he complained 'endeavour to increase the libidinous feelings of their wives by every means in their power' while 'assiduously study[ing] to prevent their indulging those feelings in

²⁷ KABBANI (1994, 76–77) draws attention to the image of the black guard at the entrance to the harem that recurs in Orientalist art throughout the nineteenth century. As in Gérôme's *Le garde du sérail* (1859), for the prescriptively male viewer, 'He is the dramatic fixture that completes the door to the seraglio – without him, it would have been a mere thoroughfare, but with him, it becomes the most impenetrable passageway. The women who wait behind it can never be seen, let alone touched. This is Europe's seraglio: the dead hand of jealousy without, the potential for endless pleasure within.'

²⁸ There was an extensive debate about the 'condition of women' question and its comparative implications: see LOGAN (1997); MATUS (1999).

unlawfully'. This was, of course, all second- or third-hand, and LANE turned to the *Arabian Nights* in an attempt to bolster the credibility of his claims. The sexual 'intrigues' described in its pages were, so he alleged, 'faithful pictures of occurrences not unfrequent in the modern metropolis of Egypt' (LANE 1973, 295–297).

Not surprisingly, POOLE did not venture into this troubled territory, but in the next stage of her investigation she revised her impressions of the harem to accord more closely with her brother's opinions. As she moved deeper into the labyrinth, so she had gained a deeper knowledge of its 'true nature' and now saw things differently. But it was not the sensuality of the harem that attracted her censure:

'When my experience with respect to the hareem was much shorter as to time, and more limited as to its objects, than it has now been, I was unwilling to express to you an opinion with which I was forcibly impressed within a few months after my arrival in this country; that a very large proportion of the men, and not a few of the women, are frequently, and almost habitually, guilty of the most abominable acts of cruelty and oppression.'

The frequent, almost casual recourse to physical violence in public was a commonplace observation of foreign travellers, but POOLE was horrified at *domestic* violence, at what went on in *private*, which – like so many of her observations – she refracted through the prism of class:

'The wives and female slaves in the houses of the higher orders are generally, if I may judge from what I have seen and heard, treated by the husband and master with much kindness ... But among the middle and lower classes, both wives and female slaves are often treated with the utmost brutality; the former are often cruelly beaten, and the latter, not unfrequently, beaten to death!' (POOLE 1844, II, 94–95).

Finally POOLE fulfilled her promise to return to the *hammam*, this time with three companions. 'When I promised you a description of the Bath,' she wrote, 'I did not anticipate that I should enter upon the subject with pleasure.' The bath had been a site of special – and prurient – Orientalist interest since the eighteenth century, and by the middle of the nineteenth it had come to be seen as 'the opposite pole' to the desexualized harem (MELMAN 1992, 132).²⁹ As POOLE's uneasy 'anticipation' indicated, however, this also made the bath a site of considerable anxiety. In fact she had already established it as such in an earlier letter which described how she and her brother had moved from their first house because their servants were terrified by an 'evil spirit' in the bath – 'We little thought, when we congratulated ourselves on this luxury, that it would become the most abominable part of the house' – and her trepidation resurfaced in her reluctance to enter the

bath during her first tour of the harem.³⁰ Those anxieties were now to be heightened by a visit to a *public* bath. Again, this was mediated by class – women of the highest rank seldom ventured into a public bath – but POOLE was also disconcerted by the sensuality of the scene. I mean that literally: it was not the experience of bathing *but the sight of the bathers* that affected her. She made no bones about insisting that 'whatever others may think of it, I confess that the operation of bathing in the Eastern manner is to me extremely agreeable.' What was not in the least agreeable was its being conducted in the public gaze.

POOLE's narrative unfolds the scene with an artful slowness, deferring the sight of the bathers first by the

²⁹ In England Orientalist interest in the *hammam* had been heightened by the posthumous publication of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Embassy Letters* in 1763; these were written from Turkey in 1716–18 and included a description of her visit to the baths in Adrianople (Sophia). LOWE (1991, 46–48) seems to identify a latent homoeroticism in Montagu's description, whereas several other commentators have argued that her account worked to *de-eroticize* and *de-sexualize* the women bathers (BOHLS 1995). But Montagu's letters still scandalised many of their readers, and Ingres used them for his highly eroticised painting of *Le bain turc* in 1862 (SCHLENOFF 1956). Whatever one makes of this, the fact remains that Montagu's strategy of ascribing a refinement to the bathers not only dignified them but also mirrored her own privileged class position (BOHLS 1995, 31–34); see also SECOR (1999) who argues that even (especially?) when Montagu appears to subvert Orientalism she none the less reproduces 'dominant discourses which naturalize class inequality'. But YEGENOGLU (1998, 82–90) will not allow even this, and insists that Montagu's letters remained thoroughly complicit with Orientalism (see also TURNER 1999).

³⁰ 'The bath is believed to be a favourite resort of ginn (or genii), and therefore when a person is about to enter it, he should offer up an ejaculatory prayer for protection against evil spirits ...' (LANE 1973, 337). LANE's own description of the bath (pp. 336–343) is much more matter-of-fact, confined to an extremely detailed description of the architecture and sequence of operations which he resolutely conducts in the third-person, thus: 'When the bather has undressed, and attired himself in the manner thus described ...' His sister's use of the first-person permits her to register her own response in an altogether different vocabulary of affect and sensibility. MELMAN (1992, 133) suggests that POOLE's unsettling visit to the bath was prefigured by her visit to the closed female ward of the asylum, where she inspected naked women in chains crouching in their cells, and was plainly disconcerted by what she saw (POOLE 1844, I, 169–170). But the bath was surely much more directly marked as a site of anxiety by the antics of the 'evil spirit' in the first house and by the deferral of her visit to the private bath during her tour of the harem.

architectural topology of the baths and then by clouds of steam. 'After we had passed through two passages,' she reported, 'we found ourselves in the first large apartment, or chamber of repose, in which the bathers undress.' POOLE and each of her companions enveloped themselves 'in a very long and broad piece of drapery' and then 'proceeded through a small chamber, which was moderately heated, to the principal inner apartment, where the heat was intense.'

'The plan of this apartment is that of a cross, having four recesses; each of which, as well as the central portion, is covered with a dome. The pavements are of white and black marble, and small pieces of fine red tile, very fancifully and prettily disposed. In the middle is a jet of hot water, rising from the centre of a high seat of marble, upon which many persons might sit together. The whole apartment was full of steam.'

This repeats POOLE's original visit to the bath in the harem, where 'the heat and vapour were so extremely oppressive' that she declined to enter; but now she crosses the threshold and, as she does so, the scene suddenly opens before her eyes:

'On entering this chamber a scene presented itself which beggars description. My companions had prepared me for seeing many persons undressed; but imagine my astonishment on finding at least thirty women of all ages, and many young girls and children, perfectly unclothed. You will scarcely think it possible that no one but ourselves had a vestige of clothing. Persons of all colours, from the black and glossy shade of the negro to the fairest possible hue of complexion, were formed in groups, conversing as though full dressed, with perfect *nonchalance*, while others were strolling about, or sitting round the fountain. I cannot describe the bath as altogether a beautiful scene; in truth, in some respects it is disgusting' (POOLE 1844, II, 172–173).

POOLE and her companions did not undress further and instead withdrew from the public space – and the public gaze – to a private room: 'I regret that I can never reach a private room in any bath without passing through the large public apartment' (POOLE 1844, II, 173).

Although POOLE enjoyed the physical sensation of being lathered and massaged, it was the visual image – a scene which to her bordered on the obscene – that left the most marked impression on her:

'When the operation was completed, I was enveloped in a dry piece of drapery ... and conducted to the reposing room, where I was rubbed and dressed, and left to take rest and refreshment, and to reflect upon the strange scene that I had witnessed. I wish I could say that there are no drawbacks to the enjoyment of the luxury I have described; but the eyes and ears of an Englishwoman must be closed in the public bath in Egypt before she can fairly enjoy the satisfaction it affords; for besides the very foreign scenes which cannot fail to shock her feelings of propriety, the cries of the children are deafening and incessant. The perfection of Eastern bathing

is therefore rather to be enjoyed in a private bath, with the attendance of a practised *velláneeh*.' (POOLE 1844, II, 175).

In entering the *hammam*, POOLE entered a space of alterity – there was no familiar 'bourgeois domesticity' there, only 'very foreign scenes' – and her immediate response was to reimpose the distinction between private and public space, to withdraw behind her figural veil, in order to re-establish the distance between herself and the Orient that the *hammam* threatened to collapse. The danger in the labyrinth was not only that of losing one's way, evidently, but of losing one's self.

Scriptings, citationary structures, and striated spaces

'Those who trusted to Baedeker began in an orderly manner with the right aisle, worked up it into the right transept, where they disappeared into a door leading to the sacristy and ... chapel, to emerge presently & inspect in turn the chapels to the right of the choir, the choir, the chapels to the left of the choir, the left transept and finally came down the left aisle and departed exhausted and frozen into the warmer air outside.' E.M. Forster: *The Lucy Novels: Early sketches for A Room with a View*.

Forster's draft is a fictional gloss on a non-fictional text that suggests how far the production of striated spaces within modern cultures of travel depends on the textualization of routes and itineraries in canonical travel writings and in authoritative guidebooks like Baedeker and Murray that 'scripted' the spaces and practices of tourism (BUZARD 1993; GREGORY 1999). The sense of tourism as an earnest 'learning-by-rote', a proto-Taylorist discipline of cites, sites and sights, was a preoccupation of Victorian and Edwardian high culture.

'Many Victorian and Edwardian tourists fed on a penitential diet of erudition and then sacrificed themselves to a remorseless regime of museums, galleries, monuments, ruins and churches. They underwent rigorous courses of reading before their departure; meekly submitted to compendious guidebooks on their arrival; and usually returned home in a state of exhaustion and guilt, "haunted", as Hillard put it, "by visions of churches that had not been seen and galleries that had not been visited."' (PEMBLE 1987, 68).

But if 'Murrayolatry' and its branches provided what STOWE (1994) calls 'the liturgy of modern travel', this was a practice that had a long and fractious history and it had, over the years, attracted the attention not only of disciples but also of apostates. As I want to show, therefore, establishing 'the straight and narrow', in cultures of travel as in other cultural spheres, was far from straightforward: the striation of space could be as fluid and precarious as the discursive production of rhizomatic and labyrinthine spaces. I will focus on Europe because it was there that modern cultures of travel

established the intimacy of scripting and striation. But this way of (sight)seeing the world was embedded within a colonising apparatus of power, knowledge and geography that in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to be constituted as the 'normal' way of knowing other cultures and other landscapes and, for that matter, of rendering them as 'other'.

*The scripted continent*³¹⁾

Between the seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries the Grand Tour provided the canonical model for aristocratic and bourgeois travel within Europe. As CHARD (1999, 10–13) has shown, its hegemonic power derived from its double status as both discourse and spatial practice that defined a field of objects, a range of speaking and viewing positions from which to consider them, and a network of possible responses that together produced an imaginative geography by means of which Europe was 'narrativized' or, in my terms, serialized and striated.³²⁾ Many travellers committed their tours to print but, following established convention, they did so not as autobiographies – epic accounts of incident and adventure – but as sources of 'pleasurable instruction' for those who would follow in their footsteps, either from the comfort of their armchairs or from the decidedly less plush seats of a post-chaise rattling across the European landscape. The summit of the Tour was Italy, and Thomas Addison's *Remarks on several parts of Italy*, first published in 1705, became the *vade mecum* for English tourists, so much so indeed that BATTEN (1978) suggests that 'virtually every eighteenth-century travel description of Italy bears witness to its author's familiarity with Addison's work.' If Addison's text was, for the most part, resolutely 'frigid and impersonal', however, the first major guidebook to European travel, Thomas Nugent's *Grand Tour* published in 1749, was rigorously purged of all sentiment. Its purpose was entirely practical; its four volumes provided itineraries for travellers through France, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy. Books like these were essential companions, and BATTEN (1978) claims that by the end of the century successive editions of Nugent, together with other compendia like John Millard's *Gentleman's Guide in his Tour through France* published in 1768, had 'firmly standardized paths through Europe and sights to be seen along these paths.'³³⁾

After the end of the Napoleonic War, when the number of travellers in Europe started to increase and their class composition began to widen, so new and still more impersonal guidebooks began to shape the emerging

culture of modern tourism. MURRAY's famous 'Hand-books' had their origins in John MURRAY's own tour of continental Europe in 1829. 'At that time,' he recalled, 'such a thing as a Guide-book for Germany, France or Spain did not exist.' There were guides for other countries, however, and Marianna Starke's celebrated *Letters from Italy*, first published in 1800, had particularly impressed MURRAY as 'a work of real utility':

'It was this that impressed on my mind the value of practical information gathered on the spot, and I set to work to collect for myself all the facts, information, statistics &c., which an English tourist would be likely to require or find useful. I travelled thus, note-book in hand, and whether in the street, the *Eilwagen* or the Picture Gallery, I noted down every fact as it occurred. These note-books (of which I possess many dozens) were emptied out on my return home, arranged in Routes, along with such other information as I could gather on History, Architecture, Geology, and other subjects suited to a traveller's need ...' (MURRAY 1919, 41).

'Emptying' his notebooks and re-arranging their contents into 'routes' not only imposed a *retrospective* systematicity on MURRAY's own travels – so that in this case the space of the journey was at odds with the space of the text – but, more significantly, it also imposed a *prospective* systematicity on the travels of those who would follow in MURRAY's track.³⁴⁾ As he noted himself:

'[T]hese Routes would have been of comparatively little value, except for the principle and plan upon which they were

³¹⁾ I have borrowed the phrase from BUZARD (1993).

³²⁾ She derives the concept of an imaginative geography from SAID (1995) and from JACOB (1992). See also BLACK (1992); CHANEY (1998); TOWNER (1996).

³³⁾ TOWNER (1996, 107–108) maps both Nugent's itineraries and a sample of journeys undertaken by travellers between 1661–1700 and 1814–20 and detects 'little departure at the European scale from Nugent's outline.' The association between travel and sight-seeing was not axiomatic, and ADLER (1989a,b) has traced what she calls 'the ascendancy of the eye over the ear' in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The privilege accorded to vision – to looking rather than conversing – was, as she shows, bound in to an epistemology whose 'objectivity' placed a premium on observations made 'on the spot' and on accurate and immediate transcription: hence the connection between visualization and textualization. By the end of the eighteenth century the canons of 'science' yielded to those of 'connoisseurship', and cultures of travel were increasingly shaped by questions of taste. This in turn suggests that the 'ideology of the aesthetic', to which EAGLETON (1990) attaches so much importance in the triumph of bourgeois ideology in post-Enlightenment Europe, was elaborated not only through philosophical debate but also – crucially – through the material practices of class-inflected travel: which is why BUZARD (1993) emphasizes 'the ways to "culture"' in his luminous account of European tourism.

laid down. I had to consult the wants and convenience of travellers in the order and arrangement of my facts. Arriving at a city like Berlin, I had to find out what was really worth seeing there, to make a selection of such objects, and to tell how best to see them, avoiding the ordinary practice of local Guide-books, which, in inflated language, cram in everything that can possibly be said – not bewildering my readers by describing all that *might* be seen – and using the most condensed and simplest style in description of special objects.’ I made it my aim to point out things *peculiar* to the spot, or which might better be seen there than elsewhere.’ (MURRAY 1919, 42).

MURRAY’s project of mapping Europe thus established two bench-marks. The first was selectivity: guide-books were no longer cabin trunks stuffed with miscellaneous observations whose repetition from one place to another threatened to erase the variability of the landscape; instead, MURRAY drew his reader’s attention to what was distinctive about a place, to its ‘special objects’ and ‘things *peculiar* to the spot’ that ‘were really worth seeing.’ The second was immediacy. MURRAY’s recourse to ‘the most condensed and simplest style’ was an appeal to a transparent language – a language that would somehow bring travellers into direct contact with the object of their travels – that would articulate (or produce) a space of constructed visibility which was itself transparent. These two benchmarks situated the tourist within a network of anticipation and verification which underscored the reciprocity between cultures of travel and spatial formations of knowledge: the habitus of modern tourism was set in motion through a process of valorizing and confirming what-was-already-known.³⁴⁾

The publication of MURRAY’s *Handbook to the Continent (Holland, Belgium, North Germany)* in 1836 was thus a pivotal event in the striation of the tourist’s Europe, and

Baedeker’s repetition of MURRAY’s success just three years later confirmed the power of his model. In 1844 the German firm started to award ‘asterisks’ (stars) to ‘those few points of interest that hurried travellers should not fail to see’ (MANDELSON 1985). By these means Europe was gradually organized as a striated space in which ‘sites’ were serialized in itineraries and arrayed as a hierarchy of ‘sights’. To traverse this space was to submit to the inscriptions of a form of disciplinary power:

‘Murray and Baedeker had invented an imperious and apparently ubiquitous authority small enough to fit in the tourist’s pocket. They preceded the tourist, making the crooked straight and the rough places plain for the tourist’s hesitant footsteps; they accompanied the tourist on the path they had beaten, directing gazes and prompting responses.’ (BUZARD 1993, 75).³⁶⁾

Scriptings and striations were not the product of guidebooks alone. Many travellers and tourists were highly conscious of following in the footsteps of distinguished predecessors, and they made use of canonical texts – some professedly ‘literary’ in ambition, others purportedly mere ‘sketches’ or ‘letters’ – to illuminate and authenticate their own travels. What SAID (1995) describes as the ‘citationary structure’ of Orientalism, for example, gained much of its sedimented power through the structure of anticipation and response put in place by these writings, a process which was captured perfectly by GIBSON (1899, 40–41) at the turn of the last century:

‘Those who go up the [Nile] in a *dahabiyeh* like to feel that they are in the same boat with the travelers whose books they read from New York to Port Said. This would be a very pleasant feeling, if it did not suggest the responsibility of keeping a record of days that, from all accounts, are sure to be of so much importance. There is a sentimental belief that each day on the river is to be of the greatest importance, just as if thousands of tourists on Cook’s steamers were not taking the same journey each year. So overpowering becomes this delusion that even letters home seem to take the form of historic biographies.’

As GIBSON (1899) recognised, the citationary structure of Orientalism was reproduced through the compulsion to write as well as the obligation to read. Victorian and Edwardian travellers typically made extensive notes on their journeys, dutifully entered their experiences in their journals and wrote long letters home to family and friends. As the tone of GIBSON’s remarks also makes clear, many critics made much of the con-

³⁴⁾ The implications of this were far-reaching because, as BEHDAD (1994, 43) observes, ‘what differentiates the representational mode of the guide from that of the travelogue is the nonlinearity of its statements, which are neither arranged around the presence of an author nor recorded as the direct account of an earlier journey.’ Instead, the guidebook produces an *abstract* space by means of which ‘any’ reader can be constructed as a potential traveller by occupying the subjective position of the ‘I’ who sees.’

³⁵⁾ Thus GREWAL (1996b, 103) argues that the guidebook allows the traveller to ‘venture into unknown territory not as an explorer, but as one who journeys *in order to authenticate foreign territory as a known social space*’. This is in turn connected to what BEHDAD (1994, 43–44) calls ‘the will to verify’ which ‘has the effect of internalizing information gathering as a touristic activity’ by means of which ‘the guide constructs its reading subject as someone who participates in a positivistic, empiricist operation of “verifying” existing information.’

³⁶⁾ They were also instrumental in the commodification of tourism. As GREWAL (1996b, 95–96) remarks, ‘What the guidebook constructed, in its clear delineation of where to go, what to wear and what to see, was a traveling subject as consumer and the sights as commodities.’

ventionality of these performances, of the routine and mechanical gestures of organized tourism, from which they – equally routinely and no less mechanically – disassociated themselves.

Performances and improvisations

But it would, I think, be wrong to read travels through these striated spaces as axiomatically endless repetitions of the same. The 'standardized paths' and 'beaten tracks' did not map the bounds of a settled culture of travel. For many travellers and tourists these templates no doubt provided the reassurance of the tried and trusted, even the familiar; but they could also provoke irritation and impatience, even anxiety. From at least the middle of the eighteenth century, those embarked on the Grand Tour began to 'chafe against the constraints of the accepted itinerary, and suggest their own revisions of it' (CHARD 1999, 18). Travel-writers joined them in seeking out novelty and variation: fearful of being dismissed as 'ridiculous repeater[s] of what thousands have said before', they discovered new places, new principles of selection, and new objects of inquiry (BATTEN 1978, 91).³⁷⁾ By the early decades of the next century the quest for novelty – and its close companion exclusivity – had been sharpened by class distinction: those who followed the beaten track and made the conventional responses were mere 'tourists', whereas those who did not were exalted 'travellers'. And yet, as BUZARD (1993, 156–159) shows with exemplary clarity, the distance between the two was by no means as great as its protagonists liked to think. As the spaces of modern tourism were extended, so travel-writers struggled to find new and engaging ways of describing the familiar, to disrupt the striations of travel-writing by discovering through textual experimentation or narrative transgression novel ways of recording sights that were already known to people who had never seen them for themselves (BUZARD 1993).³⁸⁾

More than this, however, no matter how attentively they read up in advance, how faithfully they put into practice the recommendations of guidebooks, and how closely they followed the beaten track, we need to remind ourselves that tourists were not immune from the seductions of what was none the less still new to them. Like other tourists to Egypt, STODDARD (1881) accepted the responsibilities of Victorian travel:

'We don't give ourselves up to the physical luxury of this inland voyage without suitable mental preparation. There are plenty of books built expressly for these latitudes. You find them in the hands of every passenger, and the text is the chief subject under discussion at table, at tea, in the twilight or dark, and at frequent intervals between meals.'

After listing a selection of titles STODDARD confessed that he did not suppose 'we have read one half of these books, but there is consolation in being supplied when you are pushing out into the undiscovered land; a land which is as fresh to you as if no eye but yours had been permitted to question its wonderful hieroglyphics.' By 1876 the Nile was hardly 'an undiscovered land', but the point is that it was new to STODDARD (1881, 151–152). He was not alone. It would be a serious mistake to assume that the stream of events in which tourists were implicated and the structures of experiences that unfolded around them were always and everywhere domesticated, pulled back on board their raft of prejudices, so that their own testimonials and confessions always end up telling us about themselves and virtually nothing about the places and landscapes through which they travelled. If tourists were not all *idiots du voyage*, neither were striated spaces necessarily inimical to surprise and revelation.

Cultures of travel and spatial formations of knowledge

'What is called "knowledge" cannot be defined without understanding what *gaining* knowledge means ...: [without considering] how to bring things back to a place for someone to see it for the first time, so that others might be sent again to bring other things back. How to be familiar with things, people and events which are *distant*.' (Bruno Latour, *Science in action*)

LIVINGSTONE (1995) has alerted us to the significance of what he calls 'spaces of geographical knowledge', and in doing so he has mapped out a preliminary taxonomy in which the spaces within which and through which knowledges are produced occupies a central place: laboratories, museums, botanical gardens and the like. What I have sought to do in this (still more preliminary) foray is to interrupt the gavotte that he and

³⁷⁾ In BATTEN's (1978, 96–110) view, the demand for novelty was so strong 'that it became one of the chief criteria by which eighteenth-century reviewers evaluated travel books.' 'New landscapes' included remote parts of the writer's own country (hence the spate of tours around the periphery of the British Isles); 'new principles of selection' included treatises on agricultural improvements or advances in manufacturing (hence the tours of agricultural regions and manufacturing districts); and 'new objects of inquiry' included, *a fortiori*, picturesque landscape and 'nature' itself.

³⁸⁾ This was not only a challenge for Victorian travel-writers, and we might remind ourselves of O'HANLON (1989) whose *In trouble again*, an account of his journey between the Orinoco and the Amazon, invokes his hero Alexander von Humboldt at every turn, or ALEXANDER (1991), whose *One dry season* deliberately follows 'in the footsteps of Mary Kingsley'.

others have choreographed between the 'sites' from which the world is set in motion and the 'centres of calculation' at which these travelling knowledges are accumulated, stabilized and valorized.³⁹ The spaces I have sought to map are not so much 'sites' as 'spaces-in-motion', and in this labile sense the connection between cultures of travel and spatial formations of knowledge is an ancient one. The classical conception of *theoria* evolved from 'the experience of travel' through 'the experience and knowledge one acquires while travelling' to 'a voyage of inquiry' (HUTCHINSON 1992, 33). In recovering the moment of its modern formation, it is important to understand that these codings remain much more than metaphors (which are in any case themselves vehicles for travelling): the connection between travel and the production of knowledge remains an intimate one.

I am not suggesting an invariant, one-to-one correspondence between the space of the journey and the space of the text; the folds between them are multiple,

transient and overdetermined. On the one side, there are many ways to write the Tropics: HUMBOLDT's *Personal narrative* enacts a rhizomatic space, but his other texts provide more conventional Cartesian maps. There are many ways of writing the Orient too: if SOPHIA POOLE traced out an arabesque in space, EDWARD LANE elected to portray the 'manners and customs' of Egyptians as an idealized life-cycle, an ordered sequence in time. On the other side, striated spaces could be made less straitened, the 'beaten track' turned into a spur for diversion or the occasion for surprise. In short, there were all sorts of pressures to straighten out – to regularize and systematize – the contortions of rhizomatic and labyrinthine spaces, and many possibilities for interrupting the orderings of striated spaces: each could be folded into and out of the other. If we are to recover the contradictions and possibilities that inhere within cultures of travel, therefore, we need to recover the precarious geographies that are inscribed in and through them too.

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³⁹ See also THRIFT (1996b); LATOUR (1999).

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