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*Introduction***Space – the final frontier**

One of my favourite books when a child was *The Children's Encyclopedia*. A British periodical, it was compiled and published as an encyclopaedia in several popular editions through the 1930s. *The Children's Encyclopedia* was content to exist within the genre of children's instructional writing of the time. The adult world possessed a collection of facts which could be transmitted to the young reader in discrete parts through maps, pictures, essays and a series of question and answer passages. This last section, entitled 'Plain Answers to the Questions of the Children of the World' included such queries as: 'What is the Great Pitch Lake of Trinidad?', 'What is a Mirage?' and 'Why is a White Man More Civilised than a Black Man?'. If at times the world the encyclopaedia presented seemed to be an accumulation of discrete things, a powerful and unified world view was maintained through the religious and moral instruction that could be found in almost every section. History was essentially a moral struggle; conflict and death, largely the products of moral infirmity. Fortunately, the universe was ordered for progressive improvement under Britain's benevolent tutelage.

One crucial element in this interpellation of the reader into a progressivist ideology was the narrative of the spread of this benign empire. And central to this narrative were voyages of discovery and travels of exploration. *The Children's Encyclopedia* mobilises many of the tropes and rhetorical strategies discussed in this work in order to construct exploration as an heroic practice furthering the frontier of empire, penetrating and conquering unknown and unowned lands. This mythologisation of exploration and individual explorers allows them to be used as a focus for imperial discourses of vigorous, manly expansion

and occupation of land. When juxtaposed against the active and courageous individual explorer, an indigenous population, which is usually treated as an undifferentiated mass, is easily portrayed as being composed of lazy wastrels. Farmers and other settlers may also serve this function of contrast, but explorers can carry the ideological burden of the pure motivation. Mythologically, they are driven, not by prospects of material reward, but solely by the quest for knowledge.

The danger of books like *The Children's Encyclopedia* is that they do not spontaneously combust when their ideology is no longer compatible with the culture in which they are produced. A child reader has little basis of comparison and is constructed by the book to unreservedly accept its 'facts'. Thus, as a child I read this about the relationship between the settler and indigenous cultures in Australia:

The people who lived there when white man arrived, the aborigines, were of such a primitive type, so few and scattered and migratory from place to place, that they could not have been a difficulty. No one could say they really occupied the land. They do not number 100,000, scattered over a continent larger than the United States of America. They were, and are, too backwards either to help or be in the way of progress. As a remnant of very early mankind they are interesting to the student of human progress, but they are not a serious problem.¹

The excess in the dismissal of the Aborigines ('could not have been a difficulty', 'are not a serious problem'), and the change in tense between these two formulae, points to a continuing guilt about the treatment of the rightful owners of the land. The 'problem' of the Aborigines was not solved by frequent massacres, nor by patriarchal dislocation and placement within missions.

In fact, by the 1980s Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders had organised themselves to be a very serious 'problem' for non-Aboriginal Australia. In 1982 three Murray Islanders instituted proceedings against the State of Queensland in the High Court of Australia. Eddie Mabo, David Passi and James Rice asserted that the Meriam people had continuously occupied and enjoyed the Murray Islands from time immemorial and had been granted by the State of Queensland traditional native title. They sought a declaration to that effect. The State of Queensland responded by passing the Queensland Coast Islands Declaratory Act 1985, which stated that, upon annexation, all previous rights were removed and that the islands were considered waste lands of the Crown of Queensland, and that no compensation was payable for any rights pre-existing annexation. The High Court found in 1988 that such a statute contravened the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act and therefore failed: unilateral State legislation could not remove native title if it existed. In

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1992 the High Court ruled that native title did exist in common law, its source being the traditional occupation of land. It also ruled that, because of the obligations imposed by the Racial Discrimination Act, native title could only be extinguished with compensation.

In positing that such a ruling was applicable to the mainland the High Court unleashed the ‘Mabo debate’, which continued through the passing of what is commonly known as the ‘Mabo legislation’. Henry Reynolds has thoroughly covered the nineteenth century legal background to the colonial appropriation of land in *Law of the Land* (1987). *The Cartographic Eye* is not about legal definitions of land and property, but about the ideologies that underlie the very possibility of land as property. In particular, it focuses on the colonial moment when there is widespread appropriation of land. And even more specifically it interrogates the writings of those figures – the explorers – who are icons of the discovery of ‘new’ lands to be occupied.

This interrogation is far from being an isolated intellectual exercise, nor is it simply an autopsy of a deceased genre. Ongoing land rights debates force European Australia to reconsider foundation myths, including the mythologies of exploration. A report in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* illustrates some of the difficulties in reforming an area which is created by its own lexicon: words such as ‘discover’, ‘conquer’ and ‘possess’, while not unique to exploration, form a large part of the vocabulary used to discuss it as a practice. The *Courier-Mail* reported on the rewriting of a Year Five social studies textbook, which occurred on the ground that it was demeaning to Aborigines.² Part of the problem with the source book was that it reproduced William Dampier’s description of west coast Aborigines as the ‘miserablest people in the world’. ‘His observations’, the textbook continues, ‘remained the most detailed description of the Western Australian Aborigines for well over a century’. The textbook fails to offer a critique of Dampier’s attitude, and indeed produces him as a credible authority.

This case opens many questions about how the history of exploration should be taught. Excising Dampier from the record entirely is unsatisfactory, as his description is an early example of the hierarchisation of the Aboriginal race and its culture according to perceived material and technological poverty. But an uncritical inclusion of Dampier as an authority is just as destructive, as it implies his vision is accurate. A letter to the *Courier-Mail* responding to its report argued that ‘the careful observations of William Dampier in 1688 concerning the desolate West Australia and the people he saw there’ should not be ignored.³ Dampier’s observations were undoubtedly ‘careful’; but, as this work will show, the writing of these observations is, and must always be, intractably caught up in pre-existent tropes and stereotypes. There can be no

question that any particular description possesses 'accuracy'; rather, descriptions are produced as accurate by the genre in which they are found, and by the way in which they articulate with other discourses.

As well as the proto-ethnography of the journals this book discusses the ways in which they create space. In discussing the 'creation' of space I am taking an anti-essentialist point of view. I do not seek to deny that space exists or that the Australian desert is very big. Rather, I argue that once one begins to describe land, to talk about space, one is involved in a cultural and linguistic activity that cannot refer outside itself to an unmediated reality.

Space has usually been categorised in one of two ways. There is the absolute space of geometry, cartography and physics, and there is the relative space of individual cognitive mapping and landscape appreciation. This categorisation of space into the objective and the personal constructs a duality which ignores how space is socially produced. Edward Soja has argued that space is produced mentally, physically and *socially*, and that this three-part schema allows a more complex theorisation of the relationship between these elements.⁴ Both ideational and physical space must be seen as in part socially produced: the individual's notion of space is determined by his or her socialisation, and the theorisation of an absolute space (or the architectural construction of spaces) takes place through institutions of society.⁵ This book discusses space as it is socially produced in the context of the colonial enterprise.

The space of empire is universal, Euclidean and Cartesian, a measurable mathematical web constructed and maintained by positivism. This space is understood as objectively being 'out there', a natural state, alternatives to which are difficult to imagine. This commonsense view of space does not have to be accepted as objective 'fact' however; it can be seen to be a belief naturalised by a certain social arrangement in such a way that this works in its favour. Soja remarks that time and space 'like the commodity form, the competitive market, and the structure of social classes, are represented as a natural relation between things, and are explainable objectively in terms of the substantive physical properties and attributes of these things in themselves'.⁶ The imperial endeavour encourages the construction of space as a universal, measurable and divisible entity, for this is a self-legitimising view of the world. If it were admitted that different cultures produced different spaces, then negotiating these would be difficult, if not impossible. Constructing a monolithic space, on the other hand, allows imperialism to hierarchise the use of space to its own advantage. In imperial ideology the Aborigines do not have a different space to that of the explorers; rather, they under-utilise the space imperialism understands as absolute. The construction of a universal space also allows a homogeneous mapping practice to be

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applied to all parts of the world: maps become an imperial technology used to facilitate and celebrate the further advances of explorers, and display worldwide imperial possessions.

The explorers are ostensibly at the vanguard of the establishment of a colonial space. They measure the course of rivers, the coastline, a range of mountains – inserting all objects into the coordinates of Cartesian space. The mythology of exploration constructs explorers as the ‘first’ to see ‘new’ continents, but I shall argue that their production is merely a rewriting of a space which already exists in early cultural constructs of an austral continent.

The explorers’ own spatial construction (or re-construction) takes place primarily through specular means. John Coetzee’s *Dusklands*, the fictional journal of the explorer Jacobus Coetzee, best explains the dynamic of this specular method.

In the wild I lose my sense of boundaries. This is a consequence of space and solitude. The operation of space is thus the five senses stretched out from the body they inhabit, but four stretch into a vacuum. The ear cannot hear, the nose cannot smell, the tongue cannot taste, the skin cannot feel ... Only the eyes have power. The eyes are free, they reach out to the horizon all around. Nothing is hidden from the eyes. As the other senses grow numb or dumb my eyes flex and extend themselves. I become a spherical reflecting eye moving through the wilderness, and ingesting it. Destroyer of the wilderness, I move through the land cutting a devouring path from horizon to horizon. There is nothing from which my eye turns, I am all that I see ... What is there that is not me? I am a transparent sac with a black core full of images ...⁷

In *Dusklands* John Coetzee presents the explorer as someone who finds self-identification only through distinguishing (and killing) the other. Killing is a way of controlling the ‘other’, the wilderness – ‘every wild creature I kill crosses the boundary between wilderness and number’, writes Jacobus Coetzee. Self-identification, then, proceeds from this understanding of oneself as being in the world, yet separate from it. In the case of the explorer this setting up of boundaries between self and other takes place through a fundamentally specular axis. Exploration is primarily a visual activity, aimed at determining through mensuration the dimensions of the outside via an act that simultaneously determines the self as objective observer. Yet, there is, clearly, a confusion of boundaries for the explorer. Jacobus Coetzee asks ‘what is there that is not me?’. I will suggest that this is the question that exploration never asks itself. Many of the descriptions, judgements and reactions of the explorers are born in European anxieties; they work through an archive of pre-existent images and tropes, in which the journals (and the authors themselves) have their existence. Explorers often carry the ‘outside’ with them.

That what they see is somehow part of them must be denied to preserve 'objectivity'. The attitude of the explorers in the journals towards the outside is Cartesian. Space, fixed and Newtonian, may be mathematically proscribed and described by the central observer. Michel de Certeau writes that:

a Cartesian attitude ... is an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other ... It is also a mastery of places through sight. The division of space makes possible a panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and 'include' them within its scope of vision.⁸

The explorative gaze is a mastery of space. This book is about this gaze, about its discursive construction in the journals and its meaning within the context of the colonial enterprise. Once again Michel de Certeau, describing the Cartesian system's positioning of the observer, describes exactly the explorer's 'point of view':

His elevation transforms him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive; the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more.⁹

This work tracks how the Cartesian stance informs exploration descriptions, and how this outlook is instrumental in discursively constructing itself as the most authoritative viewpoint. Everything which de Certeau mentions as indicative of a Cartesian observer is true of the explorer: he is at times the voyeur 'unveiling' a feminised landscape; a reader of his construction of the land as text; an elevated eye, with a viewpoint regarded as privileged. This privileged 'point of view' is external to the system. Looking down like a god absolves one of complicity with the scene: it is objectively 'there' and the spectator is merely a passive witness, a 'viewpoint and nothing more'. The example *par excellence* of this distanced viewpoint can be found in Henry Morton Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent*.

From my lofty eyrie I can see herds upon herds of cattle, and many minute specks, white and black, which can be nothing but flocks of sheep and goats. I can also see pale blue columns of ascending smoke from the fires, and upright thin figures moving about. Secure on my lofty throne, I can view their movements, and laugh at the ferocity of the savage hearts which beat in those thin dark figures; for I am a part of Nature now, and for the present as invulnerable as itself. As little do they know that human eyes survey their forms from the summit of this lake-girt isle as that the eyes of the Supreme in heaven are upon them.¹⁰

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This description does not simply construct the explorer's voyeuristic vision; rather, this vision is celebrated. The god-like point of view ascribed to the explorer is instrumental in establishing his view of things as the most accurate, the most complete. The creation of knowledge here through vision – the joining of the scopic and gnostic drives – is celebrated as a moment of power. The explorer is 'secure' on his 'throne' and replete with the knowledge his vision gives him, while the ignorant natives below are objects of vision, and cannot return the gaze. Significantly, the construction of the land as female is disallowed here because Stanley himself is 'part of Nature', a phrase which removes him from the 'scene'. Height takes over as the way in which value is attributed; the vertical hierarchy stands for the hierarchy in the imagined 'chain of being' – the European 'naturally' being stationed higher than the African.

Stanley's vision is an exercise and celebration of visual power; like many 'visions' within explorers' journals, it is also a prospect which looks temporally forward as well as out into space. Stanley muses on the possibility that the hour will come 'when a band of philanthropic capitalists shall vow to rescue these beautiful lands'; he sees the future as one of steamers on the lakes, great trading ports and 'all the countries round about permeated with the nobler ethics of a higher humanity'.¹¹ The vision as power, then, is also a vision of future power, the exercise of which did not in reality embody the 'nobler ethics of a higher humanity'.

One can align the subject position in Stanley's description with that of de Certeau's formulation of the voyeuristic observer's 'lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more'. Stanley says that he is 'a part of Nature now', effacing his status as alien, European and invader. The Cartesian system attempts to provide a place for the perceiver which is, paradoxically, at once privileged and non-existent; the viewer is 'outside' or 'above' what is viewed, but simultaneously is unimportant, a cypher. What is seen is objectively there, and the veracious discursive transmission of the 'seen' as objective reality depends upon the negation of the particular observer in favour of assertions about scientific or objective writing.

The codification of scientific or objective description must be denied or dismissed in favour of the notion of the text as transparent. This is 'necessarily accompanied by the occultation of the enunciating subject as discursive activity ... Galileo's I becomes Descartes' we'.¹² The 'we' Reiss identifies is a function of the depersonalised style of scientific writing; the individuality of the point of view is hidden in descriptions which begin 'we can see ...'. The institutional theorisation of what a scientific document should be encourages the effacement of the narrator and the related production of textual 'transparency' at the expense of a certain narrative style. This strategy helps deny that scientific documents are in any way perspectival. But this approach breaks down

somewhat in the exploration journals, where the explorer himself is an object in the body of knowledge gained. If the explorer is a roving eye like Jacobus Coetsee, then he is transparent to himself. Jonathan Culler argues that:

the Cartesian cogito, in which self is immediately present to itself, is taken as the basic proof of existence, and things directly perceived are apodictically privileged. Notions of truth and reality are based on a longing for an unfallen world in which there would be no need for the mediating systems of language and perception, but everything would be itself with no gap between form and meaning.¹³

Exploration epistemology, then, depends on the explorer's transparency to himself. That which sees but is not seen is always deferred: this can be traced by looking for the 'outermost' narrative level, where the narrator has a point of view from which he can describe both the land and the explorers within it from a privileged position (an analysis which is undertaken at the end of chapter 2 of this work). A tension is generated between the effacement of the observer and the generic construction of the explorer as a centre of interest. Ultimately, the journal genre itself prevents the establishment of a unified central observer.

Journals of exploration work through generic conventions which assure the reader that what is reported is accurate. But the journals are not dispassionate records with declarative statements such as 'that can be seen', or 'this river turns east here'. Rather, they are personal records, and the descriptions work through first-person statements such as 'I saw this' or 'I followed the river'. The construction of vision in the journals depends intimately on the figure of the explorer: he is at the centre of what he sees, and is at the centre of the narrative (and, in Australia at least, the explorer usually is male, too). The genre of the exploration journal requires the construction of this central voice. It is through this central voice, indeed, that the exploration journal may be differentiated from the travel guide: exploration journals never slip into the travel guide's second-person address of 'on your way to the desert you must see this'. Rather, journals create the heroic explorer, and he is the vehicle for the production of a centralised visual discourse. The genre itself makes this individual vision inevitable; for the explorer/narrator tells the story, and the story in the journals is what is seen during the exploration. It is important for the journals to have this central point of view, as their authority relies on a monolithic and non-contradictory discourse. The problem with polyphonic narration, of course, is that it is exactly this author/ity which is undone. The heroic explorer as created in the journal is more than just self-promotion of the individual involved; it is an

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essential part of the way in which the journals produce their claim to truth.

Chapter 2 of this book takes up questions of the construction of the explorer; how it is that he is accorded this especially privileged position as truth-teller, and how this is a 'point of view' from which truth is established. In part, the building of this mythology is to give the explorer privileged access to a penetrative vision: 'discovery' itself means an 'unveiling' of the land, where the feminised continent is rendered open to the explorer's gaze. This point of view is the prerogative of the explorer alone. The sealer or the settler may be the first European to view the land, but even if their reactions are recorded they do not have the institutionally granted positions to enter into the mythology of the 'discovering' gaze. Explorers are accorded this position to see because of institutional support.

Discursively, they construct themselves through the canon of explorers, comparing themselves to earlier discoverers, but in their specific historical milieu they are institutionally created as quite different to previous explorers. No longer are they fearfully negotiating the unknown, nor are they (openly) plundering the land for easy riches; now, under the guidance of the Royal Geographic Society, exploration as a practice is recreated as newly scientific venture. I have said that the discourse of vision depends upon the journal's 'heroic explorer', and that this figure is created by the genre of the exploration journal. The genre in turn is partly determined by the institutional pressures which can be applied to it, and its role within the practice of exploration. Chapter 2 examines those institutional strictures applied to journals, and the reward system which ensured journals remain within specific generic guidelines. Finally, chapter 2 shows how examination of the role of the narrator results in a collapse of the unity of the narrator/explorer, and thus of the logic of the journals' production of truth. Explorative epistemology is dependent on the self being immediately present to self, but the journal form disallows the unity of the writer and explorer or of the past and present self. Writing the self becomes an exercise in deferring the final authoritative voice.

The critique of the production of accuracy is continued in chapter 3. It begins by analysing how codes of accuracy and picturesqueness inevitably collide in verbal descriptions and illustrations. The picturesque aesthetic itself is then subject to a critique which, following Ann Bermingham's and Malcolm Andrew's work in particular, identifies an ideological agenda residing in the picturesque. It is, firstly, a European notion belonging to certain class interests; secondly, it constructs vision as a possessive force. Seeing is understood as a mode of appropriation. Hence, the way in which Australian areas are seen as resembling

gentleman's parks can be understood, not merely as an attempt to contain the unfamiliar via a comparison with the familiar, but as a way of establishing the land as 'naturally' suited to a reproduction of Britain's land-owning and, therefore, social system.

This work attempts to assign a locus to many different modalities of vision. In this vein, chapter 3 follows the way that constructions of 'the seen' attribute to the viewer a particular privileged location. In picturesque illustrations the scene is arranged for the visual pleasure of the spectator – trees being moved to provide a framing device, Aborigines conveniently present to provide an interesting and varied foreground. In the panorama the viewer is positioned at the centre of the world. In cartography, the founding assumption is that the viewer is above the earth and the land, recumbent, is revealed to the viewer.

Chapter 4 investigates the relationship between cartography and viewer-position, and interrogates the way in which the map acts as a semiotic space. Once again the implicit claims to accuracy that maps present can be undermined through an analysis of how they are ideological tools, rather than simply being reflections of a given reality. Examining them as ideological constructs, rather than 'accurate' representations, enables the tracing of their particular geographies of centre and margin, plenitude and emptiness through time, as a way of showing their effectiveness as constructions. The continuities of maps, and map-inspired notions of the world are displayed by this trans-historical analysis to allow an analysis of the connectivity between medieval and Victorian world-pictures.

This book proceeds from the assumption that there is no rupture between reality and representation, but that representations form reality. 'Discovery' may produce initial disturbance to a particular set of expectations, but what is found through an examination of explorers' journals is how seldom a discovery genuinely surprises. Almost everything seen for the first time has already been, in some way, anticipated. It is as if there is a particular Australian myth that creates an expectation of the unexpected. This is the myth of antipodality, where Australia is positioned as a repository of all that is perverse, odd, unexpected. Thus, when something unexpected is found – the kangaroo, for example – it is immediately contained within this field of the expected unexpected. Chapter 4 argues that maps have played a significant role in the production of the southern continent as a place for projection of European fears and hopes. It is expected that there will be oddities and perversities in the fauna and flora, and that the inhabitants will be likewise perverse, and, of course, uncivilised. Chapter 4 claims that this notion of antipodality was one map-inspired trope used to explain the Australian inhabitants, and to produce the colonial enterprise as a natural and