

Strategic Positivism

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Abstract: Postpositivist geographers are united in challenging a hegemonic spatial analysis founded on an inseparable nexus of positivist epistemology, quantitative methodology, and conservative political ideology. This nexus is a caricature of contingent circumstances in the history of our field. Yet the actions of strident postpositivists and defensive spatial scientists have reproduced and reinforced this stereotype for many years. In this essay, I suggest that recent developments have unhinged methodology, epistemology, and ideology -- creating possibilities for a new generation of critical quantitative research like that appearing in this special issue of the *PG*. I suggest that this movement of strategic positivism is an integral but single element of a pluralist geography that mobilizes trust and deference in order to reconcile individual specialization with collective goals.

Facts

I like to analyze data with objectivity so that I can engage with the facts of public policy, urban inequality, and social (in)justice. Please forgive the provocation: no matter where you are on the political spectrum, I have almost certainly offended you. If you're on the Right I've lost you by mentioning inequality and failing to declare that true justice can only ever come from God or "market justice" and preferably both under the banner of the U.S. Republican Party (Kodras, 2002; Danner, 2007). But if you're a Leftist academic you will surely take offense at my casual, ignorant use of dangerous words. Facts? Data? Objectivity? Have I learned nothing, you ask, from all of the struggles of theory, epistemology, and method over the last half-century, from all the isms that have swept through our field? Have I completely forgotten that facts are never so simple?

Please keep reading, and give me a chance to explain myself, beginning with a belated elementary realization.

I find it helpful to use the dictionary to remind myself how little I know. "Data" is the plural of *datum*, which has three remarkably different definitions: a known fact, an assumption upon which an inference or conclusion is made, and the starting point of reference for exploration (as in the case of a survey). The first definition encapsulates the ambitions of the term as used widely across the social sciences, and thus unleashes a great deal of controversy. In the last twenty years, many geographers have learned to avoid mentioning facts (to write or speak of "facts" instead) because of the very special meanings attached to simple words like this in the stories we tell one another about the history and theory of our discipline. These stories invariably portray facts as false assertions of objectivity, neutrality, and certainty -- as simple universals with none of the ambiguity, nuance, complexity, and sophistication that we encourage our students to explore. Our histories encourage us to think of facts as smaller versions of the grand claims of laws of spatial behavior or spatial organization, like Waldo Tobler's famous (1970) "first law of geography": "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things."

But to avoid speaking of facts (or “facts”) does not mean we can escape them. Consider what we learn about facts from two very different figures outside geography. First, Bruno Latour. Latour reads in the *New York Times* about Frank Luntz, the frightening and brilliant strategist who advised Congressional Republicans to deploy the “primary issue” of “the lack of scientific certainty” as a weapon against any policy proposal to deal with global warming.

Latour (2004 pp. 226-227) is horrified:

“Do you see why I am worried? I myself have spent some time in the past trying to show ‘the lack of scientific certainty’ inherent in the construction of facts. I too made it a ‘primary issue.’ But I did not exactly aim at fooling the public by obscuring the certainty of a closed argument ... or did I? ...

While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements, do we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the *illusion* of prejudices? And yet entire Ph.D. programs are still running to make sure that good American kids are learning the hard way that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on, while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives.”

Now consider the reflections of Elizabeth Warren, Professor of Law at Harvard and the foremost U.S. authority on consumer bankruptcy. In a speech to the University of Wisconsin Law School in late 2001, Warren described a twenty-year campaign waged by financial industry lobbyists to make bankruptcy law more friendly to banks and credit card companies, based in part on flawed studies and proprietary data by a notorious industry-funded research shop presenting itself as a legitimate center inside a university. Among the “facts” disseminated through slick marketing masquerading as independent academic research was the assertion that “Today’s record number of personal bankruptcies costs every American family \$400 a year.” In a gripping and meticulous narrative, Warren reveals the fatal flaws and ideological biases in this made-up fact;

but a few years after Warren's speech the industry's campaign succeeded. "Fact" became fact became law became reality. The restrictive Chapter 7 provisions of the Bankruptcy Abuse and Consumer Protection Act of 2005 took effect on October 17, shortly after the displacement and disruption of hundreds of thousands of lives and finances during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.¹ Warren (2002, p. 42) identified the toxic consequences when genuinely independent social science research is forced to compete with industry-funded studies that produce closely-guarded, proprietary data crafted to support strategic objectives:

“An active market for data has produced an ironic response: the framework for ignoring all data. From multiple perspectives -- whether as a committed advocate, a scholar who prefers a different theoretical paradigm, a researcher who recognizes that data often retain a degree of ambiguity, or simply a once-too-trusting public -- all data can be dismissed with ease. The market creates an anti-market.”

And yet, even as Warren probes the dangerous implications of this anti-market of ignorance, she reminds us that we cannot avoid our responsibilities:

“There exists an eager, aggressive audience for empirical research and an active market in such research. That market has altered the nature of the work. Data have become more political and therefore at once more in demand and less important. The data, in the words of Judge Jones and Professor Zywicki, are ‘mutually canceling.’ I disagree. Good studies and bad studies are not ‘mutually canceling.’ Regardless of what some advocates may claim, there are some objective facts and hence, some objective truths. Whether public policy reflects that reality is not a choice left to those in the academy, but producing and protecting the research itself is our choice and our moral obligation.”

¹ Congress subsequently passed emergency legislation including some provisions directing bankruptcy administrators to exercise “appropriate restraint” and discretion for disaster victims; yet the overwhelming emphasis of the emergency legislation was to provide tax relief for property owners (Kalinka, 2006).

Latour and Warren seem to present us with a soaring, perilous vocabulary of old epistemological battles: reality, objectivity, facts, truths, and moral obligations. But even if we wished to try, we cannot return to our discipline's familiar search for common ground (Gould and Olsson, 1983), and perhaps we can't even find a stable ground for common search (Golledge et al., 1988). Politics, policy, and the culture of knowledge have created entirely new contexts that have redefined our words. This new environment terrifies Latour and Warren, as it should. Nevertheless, critical geographical inquiry offers extraordinary promise if we recognize the full potential of the Latin etymology. *Factum*: a thing done. *Criticus*: discerning. *Contextus*: to weave. *Objectum*: a thing thrown before (the mind). In this Viewpoint essay, I suggest that the articles Mei-Po Kwan and Tim Schwanen organized for the AAG meeting in San Francisco and these special issues of the *PG* represent a rigorous, valuable, and powerful movement of strategic critical positivism. This movement has been underway for quite some time; what is new is a growing formal academic recognition of the legitimacy and value of scholarly partnership with progressive professionals outside the academy. A new generation of geographers, therefore, is responding to the urgent need to discern and analyze the assumptions and starting-points for the things done and the things thrown before the minds of the many different people involved in public policy and urban (in)justice.

The San Francisco sessions, and the *PG* articles in this issue, highlight three important features of today's spirit of critical geographical inquiry: 1) epistemology, methodology, and politics have been unhinged from their tidy late-twentieth century alignments; 2) a rich infrastructure to support critical-strategic positivism has been under construction for at least a decade, built with new innovations as well as classical tools from earlier generations; and 3) the movement delivers its most valuable contributions through astute divisions of labor negotiated in a spirit of partnership, equality, and trust.

Things Done, Things that Could be Done

Not long ago, Robert W. Lake offered a frank and sobering commentary on the state of social science research under the simple, provocative title, "Just the Facts." (Lake, 2002). Lake is no unreconstructed just-the-facts positivist (see Lake, 1993, 2005). But amidst the horrors of

impending war and worsening social exclusion and structural inequality, Lake (2002, p. 701) noted that “One would be hard pressed to discern the severity and pervasiveness of these matters in the pages of most academic journals.” Lake (2002, p. 701) suggested that we have lost the spirit of analysts like Herbert Gans, Michael Harrington, Gunnar Myrdal, and others who were “prompted by a moral repugnance of observable inequalities and an insistent, unquenchable optimism that society could and would do better if only the facts were placed in evidence.”

Lake’s lament is a particularly valuable reminder of how much has changed in the last generation, as geographers have questioned the meaning, limits, and relevance of observable inequalities, structural imperatives, and, of course, the facts. In the early 1970s, this spirit of questioning sought to challenge the bold ambitions of a particular kind of geography that had become influential from the late 1950s through the 1960s -- what has come to be described as positivist spatial science, with a heavy reliance on quantitative methods, numerical data, and neoclassical economic theory used to analyze problems defined in part by the agenda of mainstream public policy organizations in America. Harvey’s (1973) *Social Justice in the City*, with its portrayal of the kind of spatial science then led by Brian J.L. Berry as “counter-revolutionary theory,” established the terms of debate that shade our perception up to the present day (compare Harvey, 1973 versus Berry, 1972, 1974 with Berry, 2001 versus Wolch, 2003). Harvey explicitly called out spatial science as neoclassical and *positivist*, and linked it to the conservative, status quo tendencies of public policy hierarchies and political elites. In a compelling and wide-ranging analysis, Harvey mapped out a comprehensive infrastructure: a positivist *epistemology* that placed rigid limits on the kinds of questions to be asked, and the kinds of knowledge eligible for scientific status; a deterministic, instrumental quantitative *methodology* that privileged certain kinds of data as well as certain experts and expertise; and a particular kind of *politics* associated with a desire to obtain funding and prestige from the state and other powerful interests. And Harvey (1973, p. 145) used particularly nasty and vivid metaphors to question the value of mapping and measurement, describing as “moral masturbation” the work involved in “the masochistic assemblage of some huge dossier on the daily injustices to the populace of the ghetto, over which we beat our breasts and commiserate with each other before returning to our fireside comforts. This ... is counter-revolutionary for it

merely serves to expiate guilt without our ever being forced to face the fundamental issues, let alone do anything about them.”

The (Post)Positivist Nexus

These words might seem to be fading memories in the pages of our histories (Peet, 1985). Unfortunately, one foundational assumption in these early debates has endured across the years, and in fact has united all of the major ‘post-Harvey’ and ‘post-positivist’ movements that have swept through our field. This foundation is the assumption that there is an inherent, essential quality to the nexus between positivist epistemology, mathematical, statistical, and/or quantitative methodologies, and elite conservative politics. First identified in the early 1970s, this foundation has been reinforced and rebuilt by subsequent generations of geographers. Despite the profound epistemological and methodological differences among Marxism, humanism, phenomenology, feminism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism, nearly all geographers working in these traditions see themselves as *postpositivist* -- working in opposition to, or beyond, the dominant tradition as understood in the terms defined in those debates so many years ago. When they look at positivist spatial science, postpositivists see a tight linkage of epistemology, methodology, and politics. Gradually this shared understanding has evolved from tentative consensus to absolute axiom, a first principle that needs no justification, clarification, or exploration. It has become part of the taken-for-granted world of influential histories of geography, narrated most eloquently in Livingstone's (1992) chapter, "Statistics Don't Bleed: Quantification and its Detractors." There are enough spatial scientists who do fit the mold² to make it seem as if the linkages are inherent and inescapable even today, and the fact that many spatial scientists do not use the word positivism to describe their work provides further evidence of hegemony:

"...implicit positivism remains strong within human geography. A very large number of geographers argue that they are scientists, and seek laws or mathematical models that purport to explain the geographical world. ... However,

² Some of the more conservative old-school quantitative revolutionaries have not helped matters by reinscribing the old dichotomies and denigrating contemporary social-theoretical work. I have tried to speak directly to these geographers elsewhere (Author, 2004; name to appear after completion of double-blind review). In this essay I hope to reach a different audience, those who are predisposed against the analytical traditions associated with the quantitative revolution.

by ignoring wider philosophical debate spatial scientists often fail to make a robust case for their approach to fellow geographers. As a consequence many [geographers] are seduced by the criticisms leveled at positivism and quantification more broadly, and become suspicious and wary of such research. Rather than tackle these criticisms, spatial science increasingly relies on the commercial and policy cache of GIS to make implicitly positivist geography sustainable."

(Kitchin, 2006, p. 27).

There are compelling reasons to question our collective memory of these debates. To begin with, few have grasped the full implications of Livingstone's (1992, p. 325) admission that "...while quantification could bolster political conservatism, we should recall that key advocates of scientific geography were not infrequently of an actively leftist orientation. ... A narrow political interpretation is thus sure to founder on the plural rocks of the historical record." Moreover, in recent years it has become clear that the neat alignments of positivist epistemology, quantitative methodology, and conservative political ideology have come unhinged. Several trends are apparent. The decisive rightward shift of politics in the global North, particularly in the U.S. and Britain, has redefined policy relevance. The same kind of positivist spatial science attacked as conservative 'status-quo' geography in the late 1960s appears downright radical when inserted into today's policy apparatus -- and yet few geographers today are doing this. Even as policy has been constrained by more virulent strains of conservatism, the increasing sophistication of radical geographies has generally not encouraged an acceptance of the tools, languages, or analytical strategies of spatial science as legitimate parts of the emancipatory critical enterprise.³ At the same time, neoliberal and neoconservative political strategists have co-opted a wide range of theories associated with the postpositivist Left, creating a perverse distortion of poststructuralism in action that gives us a Foxified fair and balanced media discourse that supports a truly horrible array of conservative social constructions: civil rights laws used to advance the claims of whites who present themselves as the victims of bigotry, Supreme Court opinions reverently citing *Brown vs. Board of Education* while destroying it as

³ The probability p_A of observing mathematical equations, statistical results, or simple numeric tabulations in a radical geographical journal like *Antipode* might well be defined as $p_A = \lim_{\Delta R \rightarrow \infty} = 0$, where ΔR is the accepted contribution to radical theoretical knowledge production.

precedent, school board policies using the language of theoretical "diversity" to mandate curriculums treating intelligent design as a legitimate scientific alternative to evolution,⁴ and Orwellian-cum-Derridaesque definitions of freedom, democracy, and pain to justify war, imperialism, and torture.⁵

Let me be absolutely clear: I am not questioning the rigor, sophistication, and value of poststructuralism or other postpositivist geographies. Our field is enriched beyond measure by the plurality of logics, methods, and languages that are welcomed in geography through peer review processes that demand integrity, not *a priori* ideological conformity (Wolch, 2003). I certainly do not blame constructivist modes of inquiry for the horrendous perversions brought by the New American Century. My point is simply that postpositivism is no more immune to political co-optation than old-fashioned positivist spatial science. Political ideology, methodology, and epistemology are orthogonal dimensions: the Right can co-opt and abuse discourse analysis and semiotics just as easily as spatial analysis, Foucauldian governmentality as easily as gravity-model government planning applications. Yesterday's welfare geography applications of multiple linear regression have found their way into the stats packages of American empire, with all the variables subject to panopticon Guantanamo transformations and maximum-likelihood estimates for a multiple regression model. Latour (2004, p. 228) reads the headlines of Bush Administration surveillance programs, and asks, "Didn't I read that somewhere in Michel Foucault? Has knowledge-slash-power been co-opted of late by the National Security Agency? Has *Discipline and Punish* become the bedtime reading" for Administration officials? The clear lines dividing poststructuralists from positivist scientists was erased, at least for a moment, for any readers who took note of Ron Suskind's (2004) disclosure that a senior Administration official (widely rumored to be Karl Rove) described nothing short of an epistemology of empire after dismissing everyone in "what we call the reality-based community."

⁴ We need to prepare for the time when the campaign looks beyond biology and sets its sights on astronomy, physics, geology, archaeology, meteorology, and geomorphology.

⁵ See the fifty pages of obsessive analysis of subjectivity, inference, intentionality, and human agency (of torturers) in Bybee, 2002.

Meanwhile, critical geographers presenting at conferences begin "by apologizing to their audience for presenting some quantitative data in table form as part of their paper" (Sheppard, 2001, p. 536; see also Plummer and Sheppard, 2001). I hate to use the language of war, but I must: how can we fire back (Bourdieu, 2003) if we lay down some of our weapons? Even worse, how can we fight when we discard *precisely those weapons that have been used so effectively by our opponents in the past?* It made some sense to challenge quantification when the U.S. Defense Secretary running a genocidal bombing campaign had been called "an IBM machine with legs." But that was forty years ago. Today quantification has been essential in the efforts of researchers at IraqBodyCount.org (as well as researchers at Johns Hopkins and Baghdad's Al Mustansiriya University; Burnham et al., 2006) to count those who would not otherwise count -- to challenge the deceptive numerical deconstructions and Rumsfeldian unknown unknowns, to move from "the disembodied space of neorealist geopolitics to a field of real live human subjects with names, families, and hometowns" (Hyndman, 2007, p. 36).⁶ All statistics are social constructions. But when critical geographers abandon statistics, we give up certain opportunities to shape and mobilize those constructions for progressive purposes. Our unilateral disarmament allows the socially constructed world of measurement to become just a little bit more conservative, more ignorant of geography, and usually both.

A New Infrastructure

Since the early 1990s, critical geographers have built a comprehensive infrastructure for a powerful movement that emphasizes analytical rigor, scholarly accountability, and progressive, strategic relevance. Many elements of this movement revive the traditions of the 1960s and 1970s, and so purists may well question what is genuinely new (cf. Bunge, 1962; Marchand, 1974; Morrill, 1969; Taylor, 1976). Yet geography's historiography includes more than a few pieces of dangerous baggage that we need to leave behind, and enough has changed in geography's context -- a newly woven world of neoliberalism, inequality, and injustice, an intensified neoliberalization of the academy -- to justify an emphasis on the innovations and new

⁶ As Hyndman reminds us, counting does not always succeed. "In both Iraq and Afghanistan our deaths appear to matter much more than their deaths" (p. 43). But the counterfactual remains crucial: where would we be if there had been no challenge at all, no counting at all, in opposition to Tommy Franks's callous one-liner, "We don't do body counts."?

contributions of this movement. Even as it draws on the heritage of geography and other fields, the movement is creating new possibilities with a carefully-crafted infrastructure of epistemology, methodology, and emancipatory political engagement.

Three avenues of inquiry are sustaining a collective project best described as strategic positivism. First, analysts have re-evaluated the historically contingent links between positivist epistemology, quantitative methodology, and conservative politics. It is worth recalling that the 1960s "quantitative revolution" is a misnomer and a post-hoc rationalization of diverse developments. There were many simultaneous paths of exploration and failure as geographers grappled with abstract mathematical logic, simulation analyses inspired by metaphors in physics, and empirical analysis and hypothesis testing via inferential statistics. There was nothing inevitable or ontologically predetermined about the "hegemonic representation of modern geographic practice" that we now have, just as there is no reason to repeat the mistakes of quantifiers in the past who "paid little attention to the finer points of distinction between empiricism, positivism, logical positivism, and critical rationalism" (Sheppard, 2001, p. 538). Today, there is a renewed vigor in creating new intersections of epistemology and method, demonstrated most clearly in Jessie Poon's (2003, 2004, 2005) historiography of quantitative methods. Poon skillfully unravels the knot, and observes that "There is no reason why philosophical foundationalism that has been popular in the past in quantitative geography need be mortgaged into a conservative and undemocratic posture in the sociology of knowledge ..." (2005, p. 770). Put simply: be careful, be modest, be critical.⁷ Moreover, Poon dismantles the counterproductive caricatures of quantitative-positivist analysis. In place of the old familiar straitjacket of the scientific method, Poon (2003) offers analogies of "methodological legislation" and "statistical governance" to describe how quantitative researchers do their work, compare results, and search for consensus on shared insights. Methodological legislation is a remarkably powerful idea. It allows us to understand our history in a new light -- to leave behind the tainted legacy of social physics with its universal laws waiting to be uncovered by the lab-coat technician. Poon's methodological legislation encourages us to be legislators, judges, lawyers -- but also organizers and protesters. Who passed this law? Why? What can we do about it? Let's fight for a better law! Sadly, many geographers miss the opportunity to ask these kinds of

⁷ I hope it is clear that this statement is not directed solely to positivist spatial scientists. Positivism has no monopoly on Truth, but it also has no monopoly on arrogance.

questions. Much of the commentary in a recent retrospective on Tobler's (1970) first law of geography, for instance, was devoted the fights over the old meanings of law (Tobler, 2004).⁸

Second, the philosophical foundations of spatial science have been rebuilt through a more selective and cautious engagement between a chastened positivist epistemology and multiple postpositivist hybrid geographies (Kwan, 2004). One result involves a shift beyond the familiar effort to show how scientific facts are constructed, towards more wise strategies to a) distinguish constructions that are useful from those that are irrelevant or dangerous, and b) imagine and create more emancipatory constructions of economy, society, or space. Hannah (2001, p. 516), for example, develops a potent theory of "statistical citizenship" -- "a strategic active engagement in the construction of the statistical representation by which individuals are constructed as political actors, objects of social policy, and/or consumers." Hannah's notion refines and sharpens the interdisciplinary work of the Radical Statistics Group (see Dorling and Simpson, 1999, and the journal *Radical Statistics*, at www.radstats.org.uk), and avoids the disempowering paralysis that sets in after we challenge official statistics without pursuing emancipatory alternatives. Mobilization to be represented in certain types of official statistics is just one of many kinds of strategic innovations that can be built on Hannah's foundation of social constructivism *al dente* -- an epistemology recognizing the "human ontological situation" in which we must take some things for granted as real, even as we explore the constructed nature of other things (see Hannah, 1998, 2001; Latour, 2004; Sheppard, 2001).

Third, analysts have begun work on the methodological apparatus that will be required to translate social constructivism *al dente* into clear, workable research agenda. Some of this work entails the specification of how particular postpositivist frameworks can benefit from methods traditionally viewed as strictly positivist spatial science. A non-stratified, non-random sample includes innovations at the nexus between feminism, quantification, and visualization (Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Kwan, 2002; McLafferty, 1995, 2003), fusions of queer theory, quantification,

⁸ Not surprisingly, when the commentaries focused on the old social physics connotations of law, the discussion became yet another struggle over foundationalism, universality, causality, and epistemology. Barnes (2004) offered a brilliant but misplaced commentary intended "to discard the very talk of laws altogether," in favor of a science-studies analysis of the contingent social, institutional, and geographical circumstances in which Tobler developed his ideas; it's a rich and wonderful story, but Tobler (2004, p. 307) observes wryly that "Barnes seems to feel that the context of the discovery of a law somehow affects its validity."

and cartography (Brown and Boyle, 2000; Cieri, 20003), quantitative political economy reconstructions of hegemonic neoclassical models and neoliberal policies (Hackworth, 2007; Plummer et al., 1998), alloys forged between quantitative Q method techniques and antiessentialist theories of human subjectivity and identity (Robbins and Krueger, 2000), and engagements between critical realist epistemologies and expansion-method analyses of context and contingency (Casetti, 1972; Jones and Hanham, 1995). Other geographers are working with the standard tools of classical spatial science to craft rigorous but strategic research that appeals to positivist truth-claims to demand accountability and action from the state; recent perversions of public authority, particularly in the U.S., have made it clear that the positivist spatial science once attacked as "establishment geography" (Eliot Hurst, 1973) is now seen by authorities as an insurgent threat. The facts documented and mobilized by social scientists threaten the ideological "facts" performed by a powerful Right-wing governmentality machine. There are millions of progressive activists, organizers, and allies working to pursue their particular agenda for social justice. Whether they emphasize difference or universality in how their cause relates to other causes, most activists have no trouble fusing their sense of politics and identity with the tools of positivism. Especially in settings where past inequalities and oppressions have been justified on the basis of the tools of positivism, activists use data, statistics, maps, models, and many other tools to challenge the state, to build public support, or to collect evidence for litigation. Many progressive activists are looking for precisely those tools that have been withdrawn from much of our curriculum. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that most activists on the front lines do not need university researchers to help them understand the social theory that informs their struggle. Usually, the activist is the expert on that, and is asked to teach the professor. But many activists *do* need help marshalling the kind of evidence that meets the standards of proof established by the state, corporations, or general public discourse; activists certainly don't need to have faith in a universal ontology of certainty and truth to know that this kind of evidence is at least somewhat harder to dismiss precisely because it meets the standards defined by the opponents. When activists need this kind of help, fewer geographers are in a position to respond. For those who can and do respond -- for instance, those working with marginalized community groups to mobilize and remake GIS -- it is clear that "insurgent quantitative practices" hold great potential for "using the tools of industry and the state to beat them at their own game" (Sheppard, 2001, p. 550; cf. Ghose and Ellwood, 2003).

Trust

The shared assumption of postpositivist geographies -- that the old-school quantitative revolution approach is epistemologically restrictive and politically repressive -- is historically and socially constructed. The linkages between methodology and epistemology are negotiated and chosen, as are the presumed dichotomies between qualitative and quantitative inquiry. These shared assumptions become facts -- things that are done -- when they are widely performed and repeated. When talented, hardworking young scholars who see themselves as politically progressive, intellectually ambitious, and theoretically cutting-edge decide to avoid learning what is perceived as a flawed positivism, the result is a powerful self-selection process. Each scholar who makes this decision unintentionally diminishes the pool of quantitative skills amongst political progressives, while also relinquishing the opportunity to communicate with (and challenge) conservative quantifiers and policy analysts on their own turf. Positivism begins to look more like its caricature.

Fortunately, a new generation of geographers is moving beyond the old dichotomies that trapped those of us plagued with the vivid but blinding memories of old fights and grand ambitions (some of my own baggage comes from Gould, 1979; Harvey, 1973; Hart, 1982). Many in this new generation are predisposed to the kind of spirit that Wolch (2003, p. 645) describes as radical openness -- a hunger to embrace "the rich tapestry of the field as it has been woven throughout its recent history, nourished by the quantitative revolution, the rise of Marxian and humanistic geographies, and the effervescence of feminist, postmodern, and post-Colonial thought." To be sure, pluralism has risks. Many have warned of the dangers of a mix-and-match eclecticism; there are some features of alternatives epistemologies and methodologies that simply cannot be reconciled.

But the final point I wish to make in this essay is much more prosaic, and applies even when we find different approaches that can come together. How do we actually accomplish the radical openness that Wolch describes? How can we ever find the time to master the dizzying array of traditions and techniques required to create truly hybrid geographies, without giving up the depth that comes with specialization in social theory or spatial econometrics or feminist ethnography or

participant observation or policy analysis or ... the list goes on. And may not be impossible, but it takes a lot of time and money -- and both are viciously restricted and regimented for professional geographers working in the public and private sectors, community activists and organic intellectuals living in economic poverty, students and untenured and contingent faculty in the sausage factory of the neoliberal academy (Smith, 2000). If we're not careful, radical openness slides into a fragmented, shallow engagement that leaves us equally incompetent in everything. This is why so many of us, open-minded as we would like to think we are, sometimes find ourselves reasserting the boundaries that we have worked hard to learn when we come face to face with hybrid geographies that need a bit more work. Expertise does matter.

Perhaps there are solutions to these constraints that involve words with many syllables, texts by enigmatic theorists, or equations spanning the entire Greek alphabet. But the solution I see involves the simple matter of trust. This is not quite as simple as a Rodney King plea for us all to get along (although that is very important too). Rather, I am arguing for a spirit of trust that must be constantly rebuilt and renegotiated -- something like a practice of judicial deference that is stable but not immutable, durable but never unconditional. When we trust each other in this way, we allow one another to specialize, and as long as we maintain this trust we begin to create a division of labor that builds genuine collective expertise that earns and receives individual recognition and deference -- for specialists everywhere on the continua from qualitative to quantitative, intensive to extensive, economic to cultural, theoretical to empirical, theoretical to applied, and whatever other duality we may produce tomorrow (however unintentionally). Strategic positivism is only one of the strands of the rich tapestry of human geography today. But the fabric would be frayed without it. The articles that Kwan and Schwanen have stewarded for this issue of the *PG* offer some of the finest examples of how a renewed critical and analytical spirit can further the goals of social and geographical justice.

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