

# New Directions in Travel Writing Studies

Edited by

Julia Kuehn

Paul Smethurst



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# Contributors

**Bill Ashcroft** is a renowned critic and theorist, a founding exponent of post-colonial theory, and co-author of *The Empire Writes Back*, the first text to examine systematically the field of post-colonial studies. He is author and co-author of sixteen books, variously translated into six languages, over 170 chapters and papers, and he is on the editorial boards of ten international journals. He holds the position of an Australian Professorial Fellow at the University of New South Wales, working on the project 'Future Thinking: Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures'.

**Wendy Bracewell** was born in Sydney, brought up in northern California, and works in London, at UCL's School of Slavonic and East European Studies, where she is Professor of South-East European History. She has written on a variety of topics in early modern and modern Balkan history, and led the 'East Looks West' project, which indexed, anthologized and re-evaluated east European travel accounts of Europe, 1550–2000. She is now writing a study of European travel polemics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She likes travelling, but packing makes her anxious.

**Steve Clark** is currently Visiting Professor at the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology at the University of Tokyo. Previous publications include *Travel Writing and Empire* (1999, editor) and *Asian Crossings: Travel Writing on China, Japan and South-East Asia* (2008, co-editor with Paul Smethurst).

**Vanessa Collingridge** is currently researching her PhD 'Mapping Myths: the Fantastic History of the Great Southern Continent' at the University of Glasgow's Department of Geography and Earth Sciences. A broadcaster and journalist specializing in science, environment and history, she is also author of a historical biography *Captain Cook* (2002) and a range of other works focusing especially on the history of Pacific exploration, and the history of Australia. Her current research interests are in the history of science, cartography and geographical ideas, particularly in early modern and Enlightenment Europe, and indigenous 'ways of knowing' and 'mapping' the lands and seas in Asia and the Pacific.

**Charles Forsdick** is James Barrow Professor of French at the University of Liverpool, UK, and has been since 2012 Arts and Humanities Research Council Theme Leadership Fellow for ‘Translating Cultures.’ He has published on exoticism, travel writing, post-colonial literature, histories of slavery, and the Francophone Caribbean (especially Haiti).

**Joseph Gualtieri** is a PhD candidate at the University of Hong Kong. His work focuses on geographical perception in contemporary travel writing. He is currently preparing a study of political discourse and environmental anxieties in East Asian metropolises.

**Otto Heim** has been teaching in the School of English at the University of Hong Kong since 2001. His publications include *Writing Along Broken Lines: Violence and Ethnicity in Contemporary Maori Fiction* and *Inventing the Past: Memory Work in Culture and History*. His current research focuses on literary culture and practice in Oceania and most recently he has written on sovereignty and ecology in Pacific Island poetry, literary citizenship in Samoan writing, and memory and community in Pacific theatre.

**Graham Huggan** teaches in the School of English at the University of Leeds. His research interests include comparative post-colonial literatures, environmental humanities, and contemporary travel writing, and in this last area he has published two books: *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (with Patrick Holland), and *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization*. His most recent books are the sole-edited *Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* and the monograph *Nature’s Saviours: Celebrity Conservationists in the Television Age* (both 2013).

**Adam Jaworski** is Professor of Language and Communication at the School of English, University of Hong Kong. He has published widely on such topics as language and globalization, display of languages in space, media discourse, nonverbal communication, and text-based art. His most recent publications include *The Discourse Reader*, 3rd edition (2014, with Nik Coupland), and a special issue of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* on *Sociolinguistics and Tourism* (2014, with Crispin Thurlow and Monica Heller). With Nik Coupland he edits the Oxford University Press book series, *Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics*.

**Peter J. Kitson** is Professor of English at the University of East Anglia. He is the author of *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760–1840* (2013), *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter* (2007), and *Romantic Literature, Science and Exploration: Bodies of Knowledge* (2004, with Tim Fulford and Debbie Lee). Kitson is also the editor of the multi-volume series *Travels, Explorations and Empires, 1770–1835* (with Tim Fulford) and *Nineteenth-Century Travels, 1835–1910* (2001–2002; 2003–2004). Kitson has served as President of the English Association (2007–10) and President of the British Association for Romantic Studies (2007–11).

**Julia Kuehn** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong. Her research interests lie in the literature and culture of the long nineteenth century, with particular focus on women's, popular and travel writing. Her publications include *Glorious Vulgarity: Marie Corelli's Feminine Sublime in a Popular Context* (2004), *A Female Poetics of Empire: From Eliot to Woolf* (2014), and the co-edited collections *A Century of Travels in China* (2007), *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire* (2008), *China Abroad: Travels, Subjects, Spaces* (2009) and *Diasporic Chineseness after the Rise of China* (2013).

**Claire Lindsay** is Reader in Latin American Literature and Culture at University College London. She is the author of *Locating Latin American Women Writers* (2003) and *Contemporary Travel Writing of Latin America* (2010) and is currently working on a project on magazines and tourism in Mexico.

**Maureen Moynagh** teaches post-colonial literature and theory at St. Francis Xavier University. Her research on the literatures of Africa and the African Diaspora encompasses African-Canadian literature and theatre, narratives of slavery and slave revolt in the Americas and, more recently, the cultural politics of the child-soldier figure in narrative, film and photography. She has also written about anti-imperial solidarity travellers and about empire and modernism. Her books include *Documenting First-Wave Feminisms*, 2 vols (2012, 2013, co-editor with Nancy Forestell), *Political Tourism and its Texts* (2008) and *Nancy Cunard: Essays on Race and Empire* (2002), and she has published essays in such journals as *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, *Research in African Literatures*, *Studies in Travel Writing, Signs* and *New Formations*, among others.

**Paul Smethurst** teaches travel writing and contemporary fiction at the University of Hong Kong. His books include *The Postmodern Chronotope* (2000), *Travel Writing and the Natural World* (2013) and *The Bicycle: Towards a Global History* (2015). He has also co-edited two volumes of essays (three including this) and written a number of articles and book chapters on travel writing.

**Crispin Thurlow** is Professor of Language and Communication in the Department of English at the University of Bern, Switzerland. His work centres around two key domains of contemporary life: digital technologies and global mobilities. Representative books in these areas include *Digital Discourse* (2011, editor with Kristine Mrozcek) and *Tourism Discourse* (2010, with Adam Jaworski). Together with David Britain he edits the De Gruyter series *Language and Social Processes*. More information about Crispin's research agenda and publications is available at [www.crispinthurlow.net](http://www.crispinthurlow.net).

**Caitlin Vandertop** is a PhD candidate in the School of English at the University of Hong Kong. Her research focuses on the intersections between modernist literature, colonial history and urban culture. She has assisted with undergraduate courses on modernism and the novel.

**Alex Watson** is an Assistant Professor at Japan Women's University, Tokyo. His monograph, *Romantic Marginality: Nation and Empire on the Borders of the Page* (2012) is the first book-length study of Romantic-era annotation. Recently, he has written articles on J. G. Ballard and Robert Southey's *Madoc* and edited the January 2015 edition of the Japanese journal *Poetica*. He is working on a second monograph that explores how the image of the ruin provided an unstable cultural and epistemological foundation for the British Empire in the Romantic period.

**Laurence Williams** is Assistant Professor of English literature at the University of Tokyo. His research, which has been published in the *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* and *Lumen*, examines English Orientalism during the long eighteenth century, with special attention to representations of Japan and China. He was formerly Canadian Commonwealth postdoctoral fellow at McGill University in Montreal.

**Tim Youngs** is Professor of English and Travel Studies at Nottingham Trent University, where he is director of NTU's Centre for Travel Writing

Studies, which he established in 2003. He continues to edit the journal *Studies in Travel Writing*, which he founded in 1997, and is the author or editor of nine books, including *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (2013). He is currently editing, with Alasdair Pettinger, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Travel Writing*, and is writing a book on motorcycle travel narratives.

# Introduction

*Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst*

Despite its long and venerable heritage, travel writing as a genre did not attract much critical attention until the 1980s. Previously, travel texts were mainly attached to historical and regional studies or used to support author-based literary studies. Although travel writing from the period of European exploration onwards was published in huge quantities and was very popular – or perhaps partly because of this – its poetics, form and themes never attracted the same academic interest as its more prestigious cousins, the novel, poetry or drama. In short, whether true or false – and this was largely the measure of its efficacy and value – travel writing was below the scholarly radar.

The impetus for travel writing studies as a discipline itself came in the 1980s when a counter-traditional wave swept through the humanities. In literary studies, interest began to turn from the canon to ‘minor texts’, alternative voices and *petits récits* in a war against grand narratives. As Leavisite notions of a ‘great tradition’ were deconstructed by strategies of ‘writing back’ and new localisms, a much wider range of texts were made available for scrutiny. Travel writing then emerged from the margins as a significant resource. When the ‘theory’ revolution took hold in the late 1980s, travel writing proved especially adaptable and responsive to the application of cross-cultural, post-colonial, gender and globalization studies. Cultural historians, geographers and those working in literary studies found in travel writing an endless supply of texts reaching back into antiquity, and across all cultures.

Travel writing achieved further prominence in the post-theory critical consciousness from the spatial/geopolitical turn in the humanities, which took its lead from French theorists, Michel de Certeau, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault.<sup>1</sup> ‘Travel’ would henceforth provide a rich source of metaphor in

## 2 Introduction

theory-based critical practice. Indeed, it supplied much of the lexicon: displacement, (re-)location, (de-)territorialization, mapping, topology, boundaries, space, place, mobility and so on. While this lexicon retains literal currency in travel writing, in critical practice it is almost always used figuratively with terms like 'space' and 'mapping' being overused to the point of cliché. The seductive metaphoricality of these terms is by no means unproblematic when theory is turned back onto travel writing, where it potentially confuses the source with the target of the metaphor. The tendency to aestheticize and universalize the emancipatory potential of travel-related metaphors in critical practice is understandable and well documented.<sup>2</sup> This is a tendency we need to guard against if we are to avoid a postmodern mire of co-extensive textuality, the loss of referential worlds and a weakened sense of reality.

With that note of caution, different forms of travel-related theory are signally applied to the practice of travel writing in all the critical essays presented here. This is a significant innovation in travel writing studies to date, as it changes the emphasis from regional and historical surveys, or author-based approaches, and from collections organized around particular themes or sub-genres, such as post-colonial travel writing, tourism, gender and postmodern travel. This volume augments and complements these, as well as the companions, handbooks and introductions to travel writing which came to the market in response to the first wave of interest in the field. It is also intended to provide a theoretical touchstone for further travel-related criticism.

Travel writing is notoriously difficult to define as a genre, especially with the emergence of critically-informed literary travel writing in the last few decades. In the first section of this volume (Textuality), we have included essays that attempt to position the genre, coming at it through its margins and counter-examples. To this end, they consider paratexts and forms of re-contextualization that locate travel writing within other discourses, and examine the interlingual and intralingual strategies that are particular to travel writing. These essays will not explain what travel writing *is*, but they will reflect on *where* it might extend through permeable borders and margins. This first section is followed by five further sections, each of which provides a different frame specifically related to travel, and this is intended to give some organization to the field. The pegs on which the remaining essays hang are: Topology, Mobility, Mapping, Alterity and Globality.

While there is plenty of overlap, the essays are placed in each section to highlight key concepts in travel and travel writing and to arrange their theoretical import. Each section provides a slightly



different perspective for scrutinizing the traffic between 'real' (mediated) geopolitical worlds, representational worlds (including contexts and intertexts), imaginary worlds (including simulated and artificial) and alternative worlds (including transgressive and counter-hegemonic). Each frame also implies motion of some kind consistent with ideas of cognition and imagination flickering across the human sensorium in transit.

As a whole, this collection of essays is intended to focus attention on theoretical approaches to travel writing and to advance the discourse – hence the title, *New Directions*. This is not, and could not be, a complete survey of theoretical/thematic approaches, so it limits itself to theories which emerge directly out of the idea of travel or the process of 'writing travel' (even then, it may not be complete). We have not included sections on 'history', 'self/self-writing', 'representation', 'modernity', 'gender', 'post-colonialism', and so on, because these larger thematic frames operate across and beyond the field, and we wanted to narrow the survey to conceptual frames most relevant to travel writing studies.

The main aim of *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies* is to establish a critical milieu for travel writing studies in which travel-related theories are prominent. It can also be used as a set of exemplars in the application of such theory to travel writing. This is intended to advance travel writing studies as a prominent area within the emerging discipline of the geohumanities. With a particular focus on the spatio-linguistic properties of travel writing, *New Directions* naturally extends into a raft of topicalities that include landscape aesthetics, ecology, tourism, mobilities, modernities, utopianism, visualization, cartographies, psycho-geography, poetics, translation, simulation, cosmopolitanism, transnationalism and globalization.

What makes this study especially timely is the present preponderance of transnational and global forms of cultural exchange. There is a widespread sense of displacement because of the erosion of traditional spatial divisions, such as home–work, native–foreign, local–global and East–West. Even existential spatial divisions of presence–absence and here–there can be confused by new technologies. Contemporary travel writing reflects or responds to such spatial conjunction, while an altered sense of local–global relations informs new approaches to earlier travelogues. The implications of travel experience in negotiating forms of local and global knowledge, and the threading of social interaction through remote localities, are themes informing many of the essays in *New Directions*. Travel writing constitutes (and is constituted by) prevailing concepts of space, place and mobility, and cross-cultural

literary/linguistic strategies – and these are often evident in the form as well as the content. Travel writing registers significant shifts in the experience of space, inter-lingual dynamics, symbols and other forms of cultural encryption, all of which can be seen in the theoretical focus provided by the essays here. The organization of the volume is based on conceptual frames matching structural procedures implicit in all writing about travel experience. After an initial section on the textuality of travel writing and its reception, the focus moves to the spatial structures that mediate between the eye and the mind of the traveller, to the experience of bodily and sensory movement, towards encounters with difference, and concludes with worldviews, which are observed, imagined, constructed and imposed.

## Textuality

The form of travel writing has always defied definition and demarcation, as almost every critic seems obliged to point out.<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Raban's famous and much-quoted characterization from 'The Journey and the Book' describes travel writing as 'a notoriously raffish open house where different genres are likely to end up in the same bed'. The subsequent opening up of the corpus through enquiries away from generic conventions into travel writing's more general *raison d'être*, has led to James Buzard's legitimate question, 'What isn't Travel?'<sup>4</sup> The essays in this section look into various methodologies and modalities used in travel writing, not to answer the question 'what *is* travel writing' but rather to investigate how and where travel writing operates.

The boundary between fact and fiction – that is, the travelogue's commitment to 'truth' while at the same time being 'entertaining' and thereby susceptible to embellishment – has always been a precarious one.<sup>5</sup> The travelogue's demand to relate to its readers the immediate and novel nature of the travel experience, at the same time as conforming to prevalent truth regimes, often leads to authorial and editorial revisions and rewritings of the text itself. In his essay, "'A Study rather than a Rapture": Isabella Bird on Japan', **Steve Clark** argues that Bird's revisions of her *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880; 1885; 1900) reveal a growing self-awareness of her imperial commitments. By contrasting different versions, he shows that what critics have often assumed to be an increasing rapture with an exotic Japan, can be read as a more subtle, ideologically-charged response to discovering a country emerging as a global power in the East.

A further cause of instability in the travelogue results from it being twice displaced from the reality of the journey: first, through the traveller's retrospective and subjective interpretation of places visited, people seen and impressions received and, second, through linguistic displacement of the reconstituted travel experience. Issues of translation and mistranslation have occupied scholars of travel writing since Edward Said's *Orientalism* exposed the myth of language transparency, and the problematic relations between language and power. The theoretical and practical pitfalls of textualizing travel are legion. It is helpful then to make explicit the interdependency and possible cross-fertilization between travel writing and the semiotics of travel.

The tourist is a particular type of traveller whose cross-cultural experience is assumed to be fleeting and superficial, and whose semiotic engagement is limited. Language is not only the medium for tourists' reports of their experience, but also an integral element of the touristic experience itself: language enables (or obstructs) the cross- or intercultural interaction, rendering the tourist's experience in a foreign site as much a performance as the travelogue itself, which translates/performs through the linguistic medium the real travel experience. In their chapter on 'multi-modal travel writing', **Crispin Thurlow and Adam Jaworski** examine semiotic materials and the tourists' own performances as examples of 'discourse on the move' under the influences of globalization. The examples they choose are representations of tourists' own mediating practices as they insert themselves (in photographs, for instance) into the sites they encounter. Such tourism discourse, the authors argue, is a way of travellers making sense of the destination and also 'the world at large and their place in it'.

Another example of the performative in this section on textuality can be found in the paratexts of travel writing – the titles, prefaces, footnotes, images and epigraphs that accompany and, ideally, enhance the text. Paratexts in Gérard Genette mediate not only between passages of the book itself, but also between author and reader, and therefore participate in and enact another form of translation.<sup>6</sup> Moving from the structuralist model proposed by Genette to a more post-structuralist and rhizomic one, **Alex Watson's** essay, 'The Garden of Forking Paths', shows how prefaces and footnotes across a wide range of examples, from Sir Walter Raleigh to Amitav Ghosh, introduce contradictory and competing gestures into the textuality of travel writing.

## Topology

Literally, topology involves the study of shapes and structures, especially in relation to landscape and the built environment. This could be limited to a static mathematical study of where we live and the sites and natural features we visit. But the idea of spatial organization has an impact on *how* we see as well as *what* we see and how this changes over time. The idea of the ‘network’, for example, has become in recent years an influential way of thinking about and imagining connections between points across space. Digital technology is one reason for the network becoming a dominant spatial structure in theories of cognitive mapping. But it has an opposite – the apparently unstructured and extraterrestrial space of ‘the cloud’ – an example of what Deleuze and Guattari would call ‘meshwork’.<sup>7</sup>

In travel writing, topologies mediate between the traveller’s sense of place and his or her cognitive response to it. In some travel writing this can become a dynamic relation between the space regarded and the culturally-defined perceptual structure imposed on it to make sense of it. Adjustments are often made, and place can resist the imposition of topologies, turning structure to anti-structure and vice versa. The empty, isotropic spaces of the Central Asian Steppe, for example, might induce a form of cognitive dissonance, but this vacancy can also be turned to a more dynamic and fluid topology. In his essay on the Central Asian steppe, as described in the travel books of Christopher Robbins and Jeffrey Tayler, **Joseph Gualtieri** explores how network and meshwork approaches to the experience of ‘empty’ spaces can produce very different readings.

Topologies are also relevant to the perception in travel experience of historical dimensions of the built environment. Significant monuments, such as the Great Wall of China, resonate with notions of enduring and imposing materiality, ancient division, inside–outside dialectics and shifting aesthetics. In his essay on Romantic period accounts of the Great Wall, **Peter Kitson** marks a shift from celebrations of the ‘stupendous mound’, to an aesthetics of the failed sublime, where wonder and awe are displaced by determined empirical descriptions. Within British understanding of Qing period China, the Wall therefore inserts its topological reality into the various ‘discourses of travel, diplomacy, aesthetics and science’.

In the ‘geocritical imagination’, a term coined by **Paul Smethurst** in his essay on the travel books of Robert Macfarlane, topologies have an altogether more active presence in the landscape. In *The Old Ways*,

Macfarlane walks the old pathways of Britain in search of a route to the past, but discovers instead complex traffic with the contemporary, engendered by his sense of multiple time-spaces shifting beneath his feet. Smethurst's chapter explores Macfarlane's travel writing through the lens of geocriticism, which promises a place-centred rather than an anthropocentric account of the natural environment.

## **Mobility**

The ability to move easily and independently from place to place would seem to be the essential condition of travel. There are therefore a number of ways of exploring mobility as a conceptual frame, such as the modes of travel and the different experiences they facilitate, the circulatory infrastructure that enables mobility and the degree to which the mobile subject is able to gaze upon the passing scene.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis on seeing in western travel narratives begins in the eighteenth century with the picturesque and scientific empiricism, and it continues, as Mary Louise Pratt is always reminding us, through nineteenth-century imperial eyes. However, the privileging of visuality, together with the assumption of mobility as normative procedures in travel narratives, might be challenged in disability studies. This new area of enquiry forces a different account of the emancipatory potential of travel and the predominance of visuality on which this largely depends.

**Charles Forsdick's** essay works at the boundaries of studies in travel writing and disability studies to question assumptions about the role of sight in the 'generic normativity' within the form. By examining nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives of blind and partially sighted travellers, Forsdick shows that non-visual encounters offer a shift in register for the human sensorium abroad. Through an alternative mapping of foreign space, other senses – tactile, auditory, gustatory and olfactory – take on greater significance, and 'blind travel' has the potential not only to widen the corpus of travel writing, but also to offer a corrective to the predominance of visuality in the form. The theoretical implications of having been previously 'blinded by sight' in the textualization of travel experience raises interesting possibilities for travelling through the other senses.

Mobility is impossible without the infrastructure of paths, roads and railway lines and other means for providing transport. It is also dependent on other modern forms of infrastructure for distributing energy and communications, discharging waste, providing meeting places, and so on. Infrastructure is the unlovely dimension of modern

travel; it is generally hidden from sight and suppressed in modern travel narratives. Yet it sometimes intrudes into romantic landscape vision to reveal the hidden but totalizing influence of modernization and the networks of global economy. Modern infrastructure, in the form of railway tracks, public roads, telegraph lines, water pipes and so on, forms the basis for modern social worlds, conditions mobility and shapes the underlying condition of modernity. It is assimilated, for instance, into the modern, romantically-inclined travel writing of Edward Thomas, who remarks in his bicycle travelogue, *In Pursuit of Spring*, how telegraph wires are 'sufficient of themselves to create the pathetic fallacy'.<sup>9</sup>

In her essay, 'Travel Literature and the Infrastructural Unconscious', **Caitlin Vandertop** examines infrastructure as a form of 'second nature' that remains invisible despite its ubiquity. She explores the theoretical possibilities of sudden irruptions of infrastructure into travel narratives, particularly those in which modernity is repressed, but which can suddenly burst onto the scene with sublime possibility. The encroachment of modern infrastructure has the potential to destabilize romantic/primitivist visions in travel writing between the wars – in, for example, D. H. Lawrence's *Sea and Sardinia* (1921) and Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana* (1937).

Arriving at almost the same time as the modern bicycle, early motorcycles would provide a unique form of automobility. And as with the bicycle, early motorcycles were immediately associated with freedom and the countryside, which was a large part of their appeal. In his essay on narratives of early motorcycle travel, **Tim Youngs** explores the range of users of this new form of transport – military dispatch riders, leisure tourists and adventurers, in particular – and examines distinctive features of the form which are peculiar to the motorcycle's automobility.

## Mapping

Modern maps are in the main intended to provide empirical visualizations of space, highlighting particular features, themes and spatial relations. But all maps are at best approximations of what exists on the ground, and are highly selective in what they reveal, what they conceal, and in the manner of their spatial emphases (centrality proportionality and so on). They are complex symbolic mediations between humans and their environment, often politically, ideologically and commercially skewed, and they also tend to conform to prevailing aesthetic norms.

As with texts, some maps are purely fanciful, most famously, maps of utopia and the Great Southern Continent. Fanciful maps of real

and imagined places used to have a function in society, but modern exploration in the eighteenth century would make liars of inventive cartographers. James Cook's famous chart in which he 'sailed straight through the Great Southern Continent' after leaving Tahiti in 1768, was considered in its time to be one of the greatest achievements of scientific method in exploration. Science progresses by disproving theories, not proving them, and it progressively disenchants the world. And yet, as **Vanessa Collingridge** shows in her essay on the 'fantastic history of the Great Southern Continent', the transition from imagined cartographies to 'real' maps based on empirical evidence and scientific projection was often fraught. The weight of authority did not immediately shift from speculative geographies supported by philosophers and armchair geographies to the evidence provided by scientific explorers, not least because this new knowledge was initially unreliable and often shaped by a desire to pander to popular expectations. The history of mapping is shown here to be one of tension between competing forms of authority, and it is underwritten by the rise of Enlightenment rationalism and modern science.

In recent decades, however, the map has become a key site for cultural and imaginative enquiry. As with travel satire, the real object of attention is not the projected place, but the emplaced society that hosts the mapmaker. In postmodern cartographies, interest has switched back to alternative forms of mapping, such as those practised by indigenous people of the southern hemisphere. Travel writing, at the borders of ethnography, has often reported on non-Cartesian, dis-coordinated and anti-cardinal forms of mapping practised by Australian aborigines, American Indians and the indigenous people of the Pacific islands. As **Otto Heim** shows in his essay on the 're-mapping of unincorporated territory' in Guam, the idea of the 'space of appearance' is particularly applicable to the latter.<sup>10</sup> Heim explores Craig Santos Perez's ongoing project to challenge the hegemony of western mapping of the Pacific, which has sought to reduce the Pacific Islands to 'tiny specks in an essentially empty ocean'. Taking his lead from Pacific traditions of navigation, Perez shows that 'mapping' is reconfigured as a creative process that plots the ongoing historical relations of the islands' inhabitants.

When maps and charts are included in travel books to support the narrative by authenticating its veracity and adding to its empirical weight, they are in effect re-inscribing one dubious mode of authentication to support another. In her essay on official maps of Mexico and Mexico City, published in the magazine *Mexico, This Month* (1955–71), **Claire Lindsay** highlights the ways in which 'the scientific and the aesthetic,

the commercial and the political, as well as the pre-modern and the “postcolonial” converge in an ambivalent cartography of the country’. While this essay is about a specific juxtaposition of two different modes of representation in a particular example of travel writing, the idea of different forces and tensions at work (aesthetic, political, symbolic, scientific and commercial) in place-writing in general becomes readily apparent.

## Alterity

The representation of otherness in one form or another has always been a central concern of travel writing. Yet the history of travel writing has been one of mimesis – the opposite of alterity – which leads to (over-)familiarization, containment and the systematization of others. To reclaim alterity as the dominant mode in travel writing is to reinforce its function as a source of difference. Mimesis has always destroyed these qualities of difference through assimilation, or by reducing others to stock racist descriptions, ethnographic models and typologies. The two essays in this section explore this theoretical frame, firstly by considering the position of travellers and how they reinsert difference by writing back against their over-generalized or erroneous representation in travel narratives. The second essay demonstrates how questions of difference can mean that travel writing shares the same theoretical terrain as ethnography.

As **Wendy Bracewell** shows in her essay on public reactions to travel accounts from across Europe from 1750 to 1850, ethnography – directed at alterity – can, under certain circumstances, become auto-ethnography. In this context, the ‘writing back’ of ‘travellers’ against foreign descriptions of their societies is interesting. With reactions ranging from anger and dismay to a correction of facts and, in some cases, introspection and self-criticism, the responses from travellers to descriptions of their country and society by travellers are not only complex but also important – both with regard to the establishment and revision of the self–other binary, and also with regard to establishing a transnational, criss-crossing network of travel writing, reviews and responses.

As **Graham Huggan** points out in his essay on relations between ethnography (or, more generally, anthropology) and travel writing, attempts to distinguish between the two have fuelled academic debates since the 1980s, at roughly the time that travel writing studies was beginning to establish itself as an academic field.<sup>11</sup> Definitions of



'fieldwork' and 'culture', and distinctions between ethnography's and travel writing's impressionistic and often introspective modality rank high in these debates. James Clifford offered many of the pioneering theoretical questions and frameworks and continuously revised his methodologies to keep abreast of institutional changes. Huggan's pairing in this essay of Clifford with Nicolas Rothwell, a little-known contemporary travel writer (who has objected to the very label), reveals interesting parallels in conceiving of and representing alterity, and points up areas where ethnography and the travelogue overlap. The essay also brings to our attention neglected concepts in Clifford's ethnographic work that deserve more attention in travel writing studies.

## **Globality**

Looking at geopolitical relations from another angle, **Bill Ashcroft** argues in his essay on 'travel and utopia' that exploration and travel writing always contain a strong utopian feature in the desire to discover hitherto unknown parts of the globe. Imperialism, he argues, has always involved an element of utopian vision, while the 'tension between discovery, wonder and possession has made travel itself the mobile signifier of power'. Colonialism was then the means by which this utopian vision would be realized during the period of European expansion, although the colonies themselves are often represented in travel narratives as dystopian.

As **Julia Kuehn** shows in her essay on the paradoxical idea of 'colonial cosmopolitanism' in Hong Kong, the same utopian, geopolitical connections and power relations were certainly in Kant's mind when he mapped in 1784 the 'Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmo-Political Plan'. Denouncing colonialism as the opposite of a cosmopolitanism which attributed all nations equal standing and the possibility for fair trade, Kant's vision of a 'moral' cosmopolitanism was, however, either misunderstood or (wilfully) misused by representatives of the British Empire – including travel writers – who used the term casually, and with regard to both politics and the economy. Power is knowledge and knowledge is power, but can colonial travel ever be cosmopolitan travel? A contrast between Constance Cumming's and Isabella Bird's colonial travel writing about Hong Kong provides an interesting answer to this question.

In her essay on 'Afropolitan travels', **Maureen Moynagh** introduces to travel writing studies the idea of Afropolitanism as a departure from Kant's 'rootless' cosmopolitanism. She argues that this is closer to more

recent theories of 'new' cosmopolitanism and 'vernacular' cosmopolitanism in remaining marked by a regional standpoint and allegiance. Translating this standpoint into travel writing as genre – home and the move towards a notion of abroad through 'mobility, itinerance and displacement' – shows how the political poetics of Afropolitanism can give further insights into contemporary travel writing through examples of work by Noo Saro-Wiwa and Binyavanga Wainaina.

Worldviews and global vision are evident throughout the long history of western travel writing. They certainly underpin Samuel Purchas's 1625 compendium of travel accounts, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes*. In his essay on William Adams and the 'Opening of Japan (1600–1860)', **Laurence Williams** revises the idea of the contact zone through a reassessment of Purchas's editorial philosophy and practice. He argues that Purchas aimed at bringing together the various intelligences received from travellers to China, Tartary and Japan to create a 'new global perspective' which was rife with power games, authorial control and manipulation. This confirms, if it were necessary, that apparently cosmopolitan projects are invariably inflected with authority and ideology. The compendium can be regarded as a retrospective editorial creation of a place ('the Far East') with western economic and religious imperatives. As a whole, it moves far away from its purported empirical construction wrought in the act of travel itself.

## Notes

1. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* [1974], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); and Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16.1 (Spring 1986): 22–7.
2. See for example, Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); David James, *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space* (London: Continuum, 2008), 3.
3. Michael Kowaleski (ed.), *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 7; Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), x-xi; Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing: From Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 1; Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jan Borm, 'Defining Travel: On the Travel

- Book, Travel Writing and Terminology', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, eds. Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 13–26; Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 1–2.
4. See Jonathan Raban, 'The Journey and the Book' [1982], *For Love and Money: Writing, Reading, Travelling, 1969–1987* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987), 253–60 (at 253); James Buzard, 'What Isn't Travel?', in *Unraveling Civilization: European Travel and Travel Writing*, ed. Hagen Schulz-Forberg (Brussels: Lang, 2005), 43–61.
  5. See *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction: Studies on Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery and Observation in Travel Writing*, ed. Zweter van Martels (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
  6. See Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* [1987] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
  7. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
  8. See Mike Featherstone, John Urry, Nigel Thrift et al., *Automobilities* (London: SAGE, in association with *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2005).
  9. Edward Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring* (London: Nelson, 1914), 79.
  10. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
  11. Valerie Wheeler, 'Travelers' tales: observations on the travel book and ethnography', *Anthropological Quarterly* 59.2 (1986): 52–61; Mary Louise Pratt, 'Fieldwork in Common Places', in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 27–50; Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*; Jan Borm, 'In-Betweeners? On the Travel Book and Ethnographies', *Studies in Travel Writing* 4.1 (2000): 68–105; Joan Pau Rubiés, 'Travel writing and ethnography', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, eds. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 242–60; Peter Hulme and Russell McDougall, *Travel, Writing and Empire: In the Margins of Anthropology* (London: Tauris, 2007).

**Part I**

**Textuality**

# 1

## ‘A Study rather than a Rapture’: Isabella Bird on Japan

Steve Clark

Isabella Bird is deservedly the most acclaimed female English-language travel writer of the nineteenth century, and possibly the most productive of all time in terms of words written and miles travelled. Her first book, *The Englishwoman in America* (1856) involves comparatively secure means of transportation (though Bird is at one point robbed on a train). From *The Hawaiian Archipelago* (1875) and *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879) onwards, she selected more arduous modes – horse, boat, even yak – for a succession of increasingly exotic locations: Australia, Persia, Kurdistan, Tibet, Sinai, Korea, Malaysia and China as well as Japan. Paradoxically, given that she was a lifelong invalid through the after-effects of an operation for her spinal curvature, she remained almost continually in motion across the globe.<sup>1</sup>

The renewed interest in Victorian women travel writers in the 1970s and 1980s owed much not only to their colourful eccentricities but also to the assumption that the very act of travelling itself could be considered to represent a politically progressive transgression of the confined domestic sphere.<sup>2</sup> Bird's status as a sickly dependent at home while an intrepid adventurer abroad gives some support to this. In reaction to this tendency to hagiography, subsequent critics have tended to focus on the degree of conscious or unconscious complicity of female travellers with the imperial project of their male contemporaries. Bird travelled across Persia and Kurdistan to provide a cover for her companion Major Sawyer's 'secret military assignment'; more generally, she sees no contradiction between an ardent promulgation of Christianity and hard-nosed opening of new markets for free trade. Furthermore, there are such occasional asides as 'I wonder how many of the feelings which we call human exist in the lower order of Orientals.'<sup>3</sup> So perhaps

attention would be more productively focused not on Bird's imperialist attitudes, but on what insights those views make possible.<sup>4</sup>

*Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* remains Bird's most celebrated text. What is perhaps most remarkable is its continued prominence in Japan. It was translated early, frequently republished, and remains both a standard reference work and popular classic. Her biographer, Evelyn Kaye, when retracing the route over a century later, registers Bird's continued presence in the photo adorning the Kanaya Hotel at Nikko where she had stayed 120 years previously: 'Her face looked relaxed with that direct gaze I knew so well'.<sup>5</sup> Such commemorative gestures might be attributed to the sense of neglect felt by the smaller communities of northern Japan in comparison to the more prosperous Kanto and Kansai regions, and also to the exigencies of mass tourism and the pressure on local districts to differentiate themselves. For a Japanese readership, Bird's text perhaps also offers a pleasing contrast between the primitive conditions of late nineteenth-century Japan and its contemporary affluence. The text's successive revisions also span a period of crucial transition in the country's development. The original two-volume version of *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, published in 1880, was abridged into one in 1885 (the basis for most subsequent editions); a later version appeared in 1900, containing reflections on Japan's altered status after victory over China in 1895. Each edition may be seen as a product of its specific historical moment, as testimony prior and subsequent to Japan's emergence as a global power.<sup>6</sup>

As the first woman fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, Bird aspires to compose 'a study rather than a rapture' (6), concerned with accuracy of documentation, accountability for error, and offering 'an attempt to add something to the present sum of knowledge of the country' out of 'materials novel enough to make the effort worth making' (6). She is tough and competent and she knows it. *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* even opens with a deft parody of the customary arrival scene: 'For long I looked in vain for Fujisan, and failed to see it, though I heard ecstasies all over the deck' from fellow passengers palpitating in anticipation: when the 'huge, truncated cone of pure snow' eventually appears, 'It was a wonderful vision, and, shortly, as a vision, vanished' (8).

Sir Harry Parkes, the British Ambassador, advises Bird that 'You will have to get your information as you go along, and that will be all the more interesting' (20), but her experience is never entirely new or original. It is based upon data, consultation and collaborative research: 'I saw everything out of doors with Ito [her guide and translator] – the patient industry, the exquisitely situated valley, the evening avocations,