

Editorial

For a *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious* Scientific Geography

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I make it a point never to give references—a very old fashioned idea in my mind. *Mary Poppins*¹

If our experiences at recent national meetings are representative, then the emergence of poststructuralism within human geography has met with a less than resounding welcome from those geographers identified with the discipline's scientific tradition. Indeed, the reactions of our scientific colleagues typically range along a scale measured from scornful derision at one end to bemused indifference at the other. In the absence of a considered debate over the challenges and relative merits of poststructuralism, we find its dismissal facilitated by congealed stereotypes—poststructuralism as antireason and irrational, as obscurantist and jargonistic, as abstruse and obtuse, as supercilious discourse.

In our view, poststructuralism's chilly reception is not surprising given the context of geographical debate over the past 25 years. Quite simply, scientific geography has been subjected to a series of relentless critiques during this period. Without a measure of stubborn resistance to the accumulated weight these critiques have imposed, scientific geography might have become nothing more than a residual outcrop on the disciplinary landscape. Its persistence in the face of these critiques is all the more impressive inasmuch as the *isms* of this period—geographies defined by marxism, realism, humanism, feminism, and more—were at least partially defined and given purpose by scientific geography, the Other they were not. Scientific geography thus became delineated as the locus of objectivism, empiricism, and, of

course, scientism—vices for its critics, virtues for its adherents. Given these conditions, should we wonder that most scientific geographers find it easy to dismiss poststructuralism as merely the latest, and certainly not the last, layer of critique, the irrelevance of which will become apparent upon the arrival of the next *ism*?

Yet from the vantage point of poststructuralism, this geological model of geographic thought is seen to itself rest on the positivist assumption that there exist distinct strata of knowledge that can be delineated and contrasted in terms of both their substantive/methodological character and their historical provenance. This evolutionary reading of disciplinary history risks imposing a static conformism in which each sequential occupation of the theoretical landscape is thought to supplant its precursors, which in turn become palimpsest features. As a result, disciplinary history under this model becomes little more than a chronicle of the temporal succession of such features, which, petrified by the weight of time and polemical academic debate, are unable to resist their stereotyping as mere fossils.

For us, by contrast, geographic thought does not consist of historical accretions of distinct strata on which subsequent critiques accumulate. Rather, disciplinary objects, theories, and methods are made possible by epistemological categories, the gathering points of and for thought. Relations of social power enable and are derived from the organizational structure and differential deployment of epistemological categories. These in turn fashion the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge. In this unfolding

dialectic, epistemological categories are re-structured, disciplines are produced and transformed, and social power is itself reconfigured.

The analytic task ensuing from this three-part theorization is to investigate the social relations of power constituting and being constituted by the gathering points of knowledge. Attention must also be directed toward the construction of epistemological associations and disassociations, the processes that certify their certainty, and their installation into wider systems of disciplinary thought. This latter task involves an examination of the processes by which epistemological categories enable objects to be recognized, sorted into categorical systems, compared and contrasted, and used to produce and sustain inter- and intradisciplinary demarcations.

This conceptualization not only stands in contrast to the geological model, it also enables an interpretation of its widespread acceptance. Through poststructuralism we can understand the rigidities embedded in the geological model of disciplinary knowledge as ensuing from the stabilization of the relations between epistemological categories (e.g., science/art, truth/fiction, objectivity/subjectivity, materiality/discourse) and the objects of disciplinary thought (e.g., landscape, region, spatial structure, class relations). It is this process of fixing boundaries and securing relations between categories that allows practitioners of a discipline not only to name and delineate objects and their associated methodologies, but also to hold constant the wider context of their evaluation such that *ex post* rationalizations can be constructed to describe their emergence and development. So ordered, these disciplinary objects and methods can then be used to reinforce understandings of geographic thought as comprised of distinct strata of knowledge whose borders are worthy of defense. Moreover, since the stabilization of these unevenly developed relations serve particular dimensions of social power, certain systems of knowledge will reinforce the status quo more than others.

The above line of critique has two implications for one of the most trenchant divides currently at work in geography, namely, the division between scientific geography and its critics. First, it implies that scientific geography has never existed as a bounded and self-actualizing entity. For in gathering the objects

and methodologies of scientific geography out of sets of epistemological relations so as to constitute a system of thought, scientific geography itself becomes ineliminably bound to all other systems from which it is presumed to be distinct. This is so in part because each system of thought employs, albeit with a difference, the same epistemological categories in constructing their objects and methods. What is more, the relationship between disciplinary systems and epistemological categories is not one of simple incorporation on the one hand and repudiation on the other. Rather, the construction of epistemological categories constitutively relies on their oppositions; hence there can be no clean separation between these categories within disciplinary systems of thought.

The process just described is what Derrida calls *différance*: the endless deferral of a category's essence through the presence of a constitutive outside—the trace—that works *within* the categorical designation that organizes difference. This relational perspective asserts that no *A* exists without a *not-A*, and thus the former is maintained to be constitutively dependent on the latter. In this view, there is no outside to any epistemological category, and hence to any system of geographic thought (including poststructuralism). Put another way, scientific geography incorporates via exclusion even those Others its practitioners manifestly reject. In recognizing that any epistemological association implies a relation to a disassociation and to a larger field of social power, we can question not only the hubris of self-actualization that lurks within scientific geography, but also its essentialization by its critics.

Second, and key to our understanding of the politics of both poststructuralism and scientific geography, this theoretical position implies that any critique that designates a disciplinary system as either intrinsically *regressive* or *progressive* is hopelessly bound within an essentialist, rather than a relational, ontology. In essentializing scientific geography, critics in effect relinquish responsibility for analyzing the wider constitutive context of social power that organizes the relationships between epistemological categories and disciplinary systems. This can present significant problems for critique in general, since essentialist deployments of designations such as regressive and progressive pose a severe threat to our ability to deploy

them to effect. If such designations are targeted repeatedly to a stabilized system of thought, then they become empty categories that hover outside of context, revealing merely the non-reflexive character of their deployment. In an ironic twist that reverses the charge of relativism often directed toward postmodern thought, *critical* poststructuralism remains sensitive to the context in which and toward which such designations are launched. Given that the uneven incorporation and repudiation of epistemological categories establishes an interrelation among disciplinary systems, those who seek to maintain the prerogative to designate—that is, to critique—must remain cognizant of the wider processes by which all disciplinary objects and methods are constructed, stabilized, and destabilized through social power.

To accept the challenge of critical poststructuralism, then, is to seek an exploration of the relational, open-ended, and unfinished character of such designations. Which leads us to ask: in what evaluative contexts has scientific geography been labeled progressive by its adherents and regressive by its critics? That is, which epistemological categories have been mapped onto scientific geography such that it has been posited as an internally cohesive and static system of thought, worthy of both defense and attack? Furthermore, given that the prerogative of designation is itself bound with social relations of power, under what conditions can a critical poststructuralism then designate scientific geography as progressive or regressive? Attention must necessarily turn toward this wider social context, within which critical poststructuralism is itself operating. Given a theory that invokes dynamism and *différance* rather than stability and difference, this assessment becomes a matter not only of considering which associations and disassociations are to be erased (i.e., rendered regressive) and valorized (i.e., rendered progressive), but also of reflexively analyzing the social power that infuses this assessment. In this way, the deconstructive strategy is more than an ideology that critiques ideology; it is an active instrument in the reformulation of social power.

For us, an examination of these theoretical assertions and the questions they invoke are best pursued by first uncovering the arbitrary character of the relations between epistemological categories and their embeddedness in

geographic thought. This arbitrariness can be exposed through allegory, a form of social analysis that refuses to take any meaning as fixed or stable. Allegory, as the endless conveyance of meaning from one context to another, generates a potentially infinite number of associations between narratives, thereby deliberately refusing the rigidification of categorical designations, fixed meanings, and literal truth. Thus, while any one narrative may presume to stabilize understanding via the linear logic intrinsic to narrative structure (with its endless progression of beginnings, middles, and ends), the practice of allegory disrupts these certainties by bringing one narrative into play with another.

In what follows we deploy allegory for an antiessentialist reading of scientific geography. We do so because, in accepting the geological model of disciplinary history, many quarters of geography have come to work within ensconced and rigid subdisciplinary boundaries. Overcoming the fixities inherent in the geological model requires that we recognize systems of thought as narratives that themselves narrate social life. Through allegory we hope to reveal the contingency of these narratives and their boundaries, as well the construction of objects, theories, and methods that these boundaries stabilize. Though this contingency derives from a poststructuralist theorization, allegory has the added advantage of combining narratives and hence refusing the fixed definitions that any one narrative imposes on itself or another narrative. Thus, it is through allegory, rather than theoretical assertion, that we might persuade readers—even critical ones—of the open, and potentially progressive, character of scientific geography.

Our allegorical reading employs the cinematic version of *Mary Poppins* (1964), a Walt Disney film about a British nanny whose presence precipitates a series of magical transformations in an unhappy and fragmented household. *Mary Poppins* is based on a series of books by Pamela Lyndon Travers, the first of which (1934) bears the same title as the film analyzed here. The screenplay adaptation of Travers' novels was written by Bill Walsh; Robert Stevensen's direction incorporates both live action and animation. Critically acclaimed upon its release, *Mary Poppins* won Academy Awards for best song, musical score, actress, visual effects, and editing, and has been one of

the most popular and successful Disney films ever made.

In the sections below we read *Mary Poppins* as offering a panoramic on the landscape of contemporary geography, with the film's two key protagonists serving as allegorical figures animating our analysis. The character for whom the film is titled, played by Julie Andrews, is the catalyst for our poststructuralist analysis of scientific geography, rendered here as the banker and household patriarch, George Banks (played by David Tomlinson). Our interweaving of the two narratives—that of scientific geography and *Mary Poppins*—is premised not on the notion that *Mary Poppins*, interpreted here as the film's poststructuralist character, saves Banks and hence scientific geography, for this would locate redemption within the figure of *Mary Poppins*, that is, solely within one theoretical approach. Rather, our antiesentialist reading is based on the assumption that *Mary Poppins* offers an epistemological critique that permits Banks to reflect on the conditions that govern the construction of his (presently) limited and constraining worldview. Their relational engagements provide the conditions for his self-reflexivity, and for his subsequent renegotiation of his place in the world. Our analysis is incommensurate, therefore, with essentialist critiques that call upon scientific geographers to abandon their knowledge claims and accept a new paradigm. In other words: George Banks does not have to become *Mary Poppins*, and scientific geographers do not have to become poststructuralists.

Banking on Science

Mary Poppins opens high above the streets of London, a postdisciplinary vantage point that allows us to gaze across the academic landscape represented by the streets and boroughs of the city [Video capture 1, hereafter referred to by numbers only]. Pockets of mist partially obscure the household lights as the camera zooms in on *Mary Poppins*, sitting in the middle of a cloud preparing for her visit below [2]. The scene then shifts to ground level, where a middle-class audience is being entertained by a busker, Bert (Dick Van Dyke) [3]. His performance interrupted by swirling winds and rustling leaves, Bert breaks off, looks

skyward, and notes the portent of this atmospheric instability: "something is brewing, about to come in." We soon learn that the winds of change are directed toward No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane, where "heavy weather" has been brewing in the household.

Here, the disturbance at first appears to consist of in-house bickering, as the nanny (Elsa Lanchester) is in heated conversation [4] with the cook (Reta Shaw) and housemaid (Hermione Baddeley) over the training of the children of the household, Jane and Michael Banks (Karen Dotrice and Matthew Garber) [5]. As the argument unfolds, it becomes apparent that the problem is more than an internal critique of disciplinary methods. Rather, the very future of the children (our stand-in for geography) is at stake. On this day, the fourth in a week in which "those little beasts" have run away to the unsupervised, wild spaces of the park, the nanny despairs her loss of control over her charges. Threatened by the potential disintegration of all governing rules and expectations, she indignantly hands in her resignation.

It is at this point that we meet our stand-in for scientific geography, George Banks [6], who is blithely unaware of the controversy raging through his household and the soon-to-follow disruption to his unflappable sense of security. Convinced of the certitude of his position in the household and in society at large, Banks alternately rejects and dismisses internal and external challenges to his hegemony and to the larger hegemony through which his position in the world is secured. On the one hand, the participation of Banks' wife, Winifred (Glynis Johns), in the Votes for Women campaign [7] threatens his patriarchially derived position as "lord of the castle" [8]. Warning the household staff of "how the cause infuriates Mr. Banks," Winifred must hide from his purview any sign of suffragette activity [9]. On the other hand, Banks' supreme self-confidence enables him to ignore outside disturbances, such as the regularly scheduled cannon blasts of his neighbor, Admiral Boom [10]. As all around him scuttle to protect the household furnishings from the reverberations [11], Banks calmly continues with his morning routine, thereby signaling his objective detachment from the everyday life of others [12].

What does matter to Banks is how the fruits of his labors contribute to political stability and

economic growth. The world he surveys is one in which "money is sound, credit rates are up, up, up, and the British pound is the envy of the world." As he affirms with a masculinist "surge of deep satisfaction" [13], it is 1910, "King Edward's on the throne, it's The Age of Men." Accepting the conflation of capital, the state, and his own interests, Banks readily affirms his employer's homily: "While stand the banks of England, England stands." A banker's role in this heady era is to efficiently and rationally finance the furthering of the British Empire, through investment in "railways through Africa, dams across the Nile, fleets of ocean greyhounds, majestic self-amortizing canals, plantations of ripening tea." For Banks, money is the yardstick for all social analysis; even the marginal utility of his son's benevolent wish to spend tuppence to "feed the birds" enters into the calculus of the economy and the drive to maximize profits.

It is Banks' embeddedness within a system of exchange, production, and territorialization—a system that carves space in the name of development—that enframes his epistemology. Through the dialectic between practice and thought, Banks has come to view the world as a grid of sites to be demarcated, and between which order must be maintained at all costs. This ordering process segments observations and their characteristics (i, j), while it territorializes social space at all scales, from his bank that reaches out to the world to his own household. The process of socio-spatial delineation and modularization is never more apparent than in his relationship with "the children." Not only are Jane and Michael relegated after 6:00 P.M. to the confines of the nursery, they have never visited their father in *his* space, the bank. While functionally separate, both sites are maintained through the necessary routinized habits that structure the social spaces of i and j in ways that are commensurate with and project onto his own grid of intelligibility:

A British bank is run with precision. A British home requires nothing less. Tradition, discipline and rules must be the tools. Without them, disorder, catastrophe, anarchy; in short, you have a ghastly mess.

Banks knows the assumptions and the rules that govern what types of activities take place where; anything short of that and the world is "higgledy-piggledy."

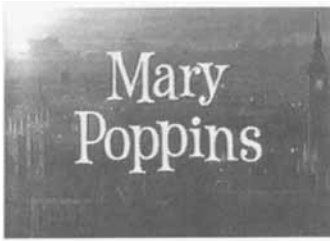
Given this grid epistemology, it should not

surprise us that Banks' approach to childrearing (i.e., spatial analysis) relies upon a technical rationality that is concerned to precisely locate and fix relationships, meanings, and identities. To determine what is significant and what is not requires a discerning eye, one that can distinguish between cold, rational, analytical judgment, on the one hand, and "slipshod, sugary, female thinking," on the other. For example, when faced with his wayward children, the putative "heirs to his dominion," Banks' solution is to *further* specify the parameters determining their behavior. Convinced that the successful reproduction of society is dependent upon his own response to this crisis, he takes upon himself the responsibility to select, with "insight" and "balanced judgement," the model British nanny: a "firm, respectable, no nonsense" nanny "who can give commands." As Banks tells his recently hired nanny, Mary Poppins, the children's explorations or outings are "to be fraught with purpose and practicality," for "popping through pictures serves no honest purpose." In a quip measured high on the scale of irony but delivered without the slightest hint of sarcasm, Mary agrees: "when looking at a graph their little hearts should overflow."

Posting Poppins

Mary Poppins' arrival at No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane is an auspicious one. The scene opens with a "fair queue of nannies" assembled outside the front door [14], waiting for Banks to finish his morning breakfast and attend to their interviews at "8 o'clock precisely." From the nursery widow, Jane and Michael cast a disparaging eye over these figures [15], the latest in a seemingly endless chain of *model* nannies, each with their own particular claims to methodological rigor, causal efficacy, and prescriptive utility. Then, with umbrella held aloft and carpetbag in hand, Mary Poppins glides down from atop her lofty perch to the entrance [16], literally blowing away her competition [17]. Immediately we know this is no ordinary nanny: as Michael tells his sister, "we'll have to keep an eye on this one."

Mary demonstrates at first glance all the outward signs of respectability one expects in a nanny, including an upright posture, a nonsense demeanor, and a "kind, but ex-



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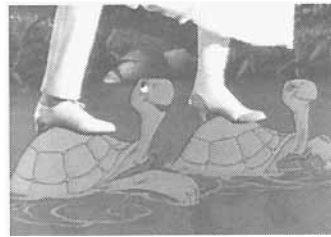
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tremely firm" manner [18, 19]. Embodying, at least until the "winds change," both the figure, performance, and style of a British nanny, she nonetheless proceeds to deconstruct that identity. She denies the gravity model by sliding up banisters [20]; she contravenes the inviolate concreteness of material life by popping into sidewalk pictures [21, 22]; she undermines our faith in the human Subject as another Mary appears in her mirror [23]; and she refuses the closure of meaning in finding herself to be "practically [almost? or, in effect?] perfect in every way" [24]. Importantly, Mary not only breaks the strictures of conventional nannyhood, she also explicitly breaks her own rules. For example, though she admonishes Bert and Michael that their jaunt through the fantasy countryside "is not a race," she later enters the track [25], outmaneuvers the competition, and is first past the post [26].

For Banks, the initial impulse is to register these feats of transgression and redefinition as contrary, even confrontational, moments [27], albeit ones that nonetheless remain within the scope of understanding provided by his epistemology. Within his frame, Mary's destabilizations signal the emergence of random and chaotic factors that constitute the dangerous Other to his precisely defined rules and methods. But as Banks will learn through the crisis that is soon to envelop him, Mary is not operating within the same system of understanding [28]. Her antics are not calculable as the sum of squared error; her reworkings of the category cannot be assimilated into fuzzy-set theory; the unpredictable dynamic of a "jolly holiday" with Mary cannot be understood via recourse to simplistic understandings of contingency; and the axes employed in her social analyses are not orthogonal but overdetermined; hence, her disequibrations cannot be subsumed even within catastrophe theory.

In contrast, Mary performs a dynamic spatial ontology and epistemology. As in her occupational calling, her spaces are never permanently assigned, but are only temporary stabilizations—representations that simultaneously suture meaning and practices to space, and disclose the very conditions that permit these sutures to be rethought [29]. Her way of knowing this space is not to excavate its foundational building blocks, but to take measure of the social relations of power that permit these sutures, and, through a process of association and disassociation, to rework the relations

among places, meanings, practices, and identities. In recognition of the inherent arbitrariness of socially constructed space, Mary can be found unhinging the horses from a merry-go-round, flying up chimneys, and building stairs of smoke while leading an expedition across the rooftops of London. And, given a world that is constantly recontextualized by these activities [30], Mary's claim to "never explain anything" makes practically perfect sense.

As a key moment in the film demonstrates, however, Mary's worldview is not consistent with the "giddy irresponsibility" of a nihilistic poststructuralism that refuses any and all decisionism under the banner of hyperrelativism. Called to an emergency at the home of Bert's uncle, Albert (Ed Wynn), Mary finds him bouncing off the ceiling [31], unable to control his infectious laughter [32]. Albert, who for us is the stand-in for a celebratory poststructuralism exemplified in the later Baudrillard, exists in a liminal analytic space, cognizant of the complete arbitrariness of the links between people and place, but refusing to take measure of both the processes that fix social space's meanings and practices and the means by which they might be reworked. As a consequence, Albert does not engage but only cavorts in space [33], the context of which he can neither discern nor evaluate.

In witnessing Mary's rejection of this behavior—a rule that is of course temporarily suspended and therefore illustrative of her own contradictions—we are confronted with the two sides of poststructuralism. One of these, represented by Albert, refuses the prerogative of designation, and in so doing relinquishes the responsibility for evaluation, a responsibility that we see as crucial in the construction of a critical poststructuralism. Mary, on the other hand, accepts the prerogative of designation, but is always cognizant of the *context* of designation. As such, her designations refer not to the intrinsic character of other protagonists, but to their temporary location within the narrative. As we show below, it is precisely through this opening up of context that Banks can prise away his positionality from its fixed and stable moorings.

Banking on Banks

In the final portion of the film, Banks self-reflexively confronts his own security and cer-

titude, and the methods by which he has strictured his life and the lives of others. This process unfolds from the point at which he finally decides to dismiss Mary Poppins for transgressing his fixed disciplinary boundaries [34]. In the midst of his summative evaluation of her actions, however, Mary performs a reversal, echoing his insistence that "children must be molded, shaped, and taught, that life's a looming battle to be faced and fought." In Banks' eyes this affirmation appears to align Mary Poppins with his own objective interests: she has finally internalized the realities of a capitalist society, and the rules by which such a society is maintained and reproduced.

However, Mary's reiteration of his prescriptive model of behavior is not meant to assert its universality, but rather to contextualize it within Banks' own epistemology, and hence to point to its embeddedness within a system of socio-spatial practices. "Practicality and purpose" and "tradition, discipline, and rules" are not universal values: they are specific practices located within the banking world, a world in which one can "learn the joys of totting up a balanced book, a thousand ciphers neatly in a row." To disclose this specificity to Banks, Mary choreographs the juxtaposition of the fixed spaces of his life with those of the children he has sought to discipline. As Mary sets up the collision of these previously discrete spaces, the children:

must learn about the life you lead. . . . it's time they learned to walk in your footsteps, to tread your straight and narrow path with pride. Tomorrow, just as you suggest, pressed and dressed, Jane and Michael will be at your side.

The next day, Banks introduces his children to the world of financial speculation [35], where the directors attempt to teach them the power of tuppence, "prudently, thriftily, frugally, invested in the—to be specific—in the Dawes, Tombs, Mousely, Grubbs, Fidelity, Fiduciary, Bank" [36]. Unconvinced, Michael demands the return of his tuppence, and in doing so sparks a run on the capital resources of the bank [37].

It is this chain of events that leads to Banks' redemption. Called to a meeting of the financial directors at precisely 9:00 P.M. that evening [38], knowing full well that he will be dismissed, Banks begins to reflect upon his own purposes and methods. First, he comes to the realization that the conflation of his in-

terests with those of capital and the state is not in fact necessary to their successful reproduction, for, under a particular set of circumstances, he too can be designated as lacking in "practicality and purpose." As he tells Bert, he can no longer place himself within the larger (scientific) telos that once secured his self-confidence:

A man has dreams of walking with giants, to carve his niche in the edifice of time. Before the mortar of his zeal has a chance to congeal, the cup is dashed from his lips—the flame is snuffed aborning, he's brought to rack and ruin in his prime.

Though saddened by these events [39], it becomes clear that Banks continues to valorize the criteria being deployed in his designation. For rather than reflect on the grid epistemology, he theorizes that the problem must lie in the anarchic conditions created by Mary Poppins:

From the moment she stepped into this house things began to happen to me. My world was calm, well-ordered, exemplary. Then came this person with chaos in her wake. And now my life's ambitions go, with one fell blow—it's quite a bitter pill to take.

On first measure, then, the certainties guaranteed by Banks' epistemology are too precious to relinquish. Bert demonstrates, however, that Banks' version of rigor and order comes at a cost [40]:

You're a man of high position, esteemed by your peers, and when your little tykes are crying, you haven't time to dry their tears. . . . You've got to grind, grind, grind at that grindstone—though childhood slips like sand through a sieve, and all too soon they've up and grown, and then they've flown, and its too late for you to give just that spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down. . . .

As Banks walks to the meeting with the directors that fateful evening [41], we imagine him reflecting on Bert's assessment of the costs of his epistemology. His entrance to the bank is briefly interrupted by a poignant glance for the bird woman at the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral [42]. At that precise point earlier in the day, he had scolded Michael for wanting to waste his money buying seed for a "lot of ragamuffin birds," and admonished Jane for asking him if he could see the bird woman. "Of course, do you think I can't see beyond the end of my nose?" was his reply. On that morning, Banks had appropriated the bird woman into his own economy through a process of



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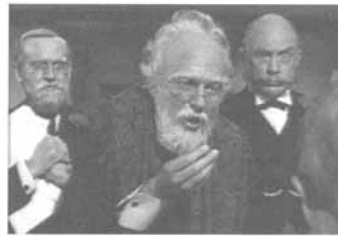
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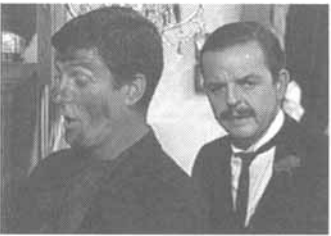
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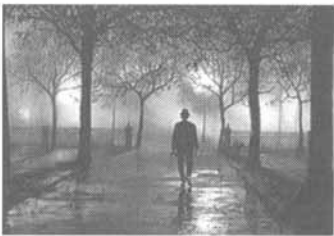
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Video captures 46–54 from *Mary Poppins*. Copyright held by P. L. Travers.

dismissal and exclusion—she became the symbolic Other to his own ordered and productive life, thereby reinforcing his own identity. However, as Banks now turns toward the steps, he sees that the woman is gone. Without the alterity she provided, Banks has lost the ability to organize those Othering moments that previously secured his own identity [43]. His entire system for social differentiation—ordered versus chaotic, cheery versus giddy, and productive versus wasteful—becomes unfixated.

Shaken, he passes through the portals of the bank. During his ceremonial dismissal, the bank's directors strip away all the outward signifiers that previously secured his positionality—his bowler hat, his umbrella, and his button hole [44, 45]. Banks is symbolically cut adrift from the social relations that stamped his cer-

itude within a particular ordering framework, and which provided the valuative criteria for assessing deviations from it. When called upon by the directors to comment on his new position in life, he responds by reciting that word [46, 47], “*supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*,” a recital that within the structure of the film fully frees him from necessary ties to state and capital and to the dominance of the grid epistemology [48, 49]. Banks is now able to explore the world of his children [50], and we soon find him mending their kite [51], “with tuppence for paper and string” [52].

As the film closes, the cheerful resolution that is the hallmark of all Disney productions becomes apparent. First, Banks does not remain the anomaly for long, for soon his banking colleagues are also flying kites, shuffling off

the shackles of the grid epistemology, and offering Banks a position in their newly transformed ranks. Second, Disney confirms once again the dominant ideology of the nuclear family, as Winifred's suffragette sash becomes the kite's tail [53], and Mary, whose services are no longer needed, returns to the postdisciplinary spaces above London [54].

Conclusion: For Scientific Geography

It is Banks' moment of self-redemption that is key to our argument, for it is he who is the agent of change. Mary Poppins has been but a facilitator, providing the opportunity for Banks to realize that his position in the world has not been freely chosen, but has been constructed out of a system of banking relations. In providing these opportunities, Mary is operating on the assumption that Banks can detach himself from a specific context not because he is a detached observer, but because he cares about the ramifications of particular alignments in the social world. Indeed, it was this concern to "do the right thing" that led to Banks' involvement with the world of financial speculation and his adoption of middle-class mores in the first place. In learning that one can never bank on the beneficial effects—or the beneficence—of any social alignment, however, he is made aware of how his care and concern were structured in particular ways. Out of this deconstructive recognition, Banks now has the tools to reconstruct a progressive world for the heirs of "his dominion."

What then of scientific geography, our stand-in for Banks? At its most basic level, our allegory invites scientific geographers to reflect on the relational moments around which the field has been organized. To begin, they might ask: What social powers organize scientific geography's disjunctive oppositions: objective versus subjective, materiality versus discourse, explanation versus description, truth versus fiction, ideology versus science, theory versus empiricism, numeracy versus poetry, discipline versus disorder, grid versus flow? How do these categories become the organizing principles for thought within scientific geography, and what are the disciplinary and social effects of their deployment? And not lastly, how does

geography's evolution, both scientific and critical, reflect the contingent plays of power that assign significance and certainty to various categories at different times and places?

Such questions have implications not only for epistemological reflection in scientific geography, but also for a range of methodological issues, for inasmuch as each assumes a critical stance with respect to the concept of the *category*, they suggest further queries on the role of categories in the conduct of scientific geographic research. Not unlike geography's other essentialized paradigms, scientific geography has sought to bind the significant qualities of concepts, phenomena, and subjects, and to fix their internal character and their relations to others. In our view, scientific geography would do well to adopt an antiessentialist stance toward categories—from *scientific* and *geography* at the most abstract level to the social demarcations employed in the identification of indicators and the construction of variables at the most concrete level. Such a stance would raise the following questions: What constitutive processes are at work in the construction of a category's center and boundary? Under what conditions are these constructed and maintained, and to what effect? Such an analysis might suggest in the small that boundaries are the product of hegemonic social processes that assign—but never fully close off—centers and peripheries, and in the large that scientific geography's greatest challenge is the construction of new methodologies appropriate to investigations of a plural and never-fixed social world.

Finally, in producing these methodologies and conducting research based on them, scientific geographers might contribute to the construction of a progressive society. Of course, within a critical poststructuralist frame of reference, the designation progressive can never be a static and fixed category of politics. Nevertheless, in practicing a theory of dynamism and unfixity that seeks not to replace one form of stabilization with another, but rather to make destabilization an ongoing and never complete project, poststructuralism suggests that the designation progressive can be recouped for and incorporated into an antiessentialist framework. For us, this suggests that progressive be understood as a politics that promotes unlimited freedom and possibility by deconstructing the processes by which social

space becomes fixed, stabilized, and exertive of social power. We believe that scientific geographers can align themselves with just such a deconstructive project when they refuse the banking world and work instead to develop methodologies and research agendas that countermand rather than reproduce the fixed spaces of everyday life.

Note

1. This and subsequent quotations are transcribed from the video version of *Mary Poppins*, a Walt Disney film distributed for general release in 1964 by Buena Vista.

Reference

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Contemporary geographic thought finds scientific approaches triangulated by critiques launched by various political economy, feminist, and poststructuralist positions. In aiming their conceptual arsenal at fixed understandings of scientific geography, however, such critiques run the danger of essentializing their intended target. Moreover, in the consequent stabilization of the trajectories taken by these critiques, the process of criticism itself becomes an unreflexive exercise. In this paper we deploy the resources of poststructuralism to achieve an antiessentialist reading of scientific geography that moves beyond mere repudiation and seeks instead to identify a redemptive moment within this constellation of ideas and practices. To do so, we draw upon a modern-day parable—*Mary Poppins*—whose film version we read as offering a panoramic on theoretical divisions in geography. Though ostensibly a story about an all-too-perfect nanny, the film's key protagonists serve as allegorical figures animating our analysis. Fortunately for all concerned, the banker/patriarch comes to the realization that he too can countermand rather than reproduce the fixed spaces of everyday life. **Key Words:** allegory, epistemology, geographic thought, postmodernism, poststructuralism, scientific geography.

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