The future of geography

Nigel Thrift

School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol, Bristol BS8 1SS, UK

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to assess the current state and future prospects of Geography especially but not only in Britain. It is quasi-polemical and should be read in that spirit. The paper looks first at the notable successes of physical and human geography. It then considers how these successes are being buttressed by current events taking place in the world. Next, the paper considers the main problems that beset geography. Finally, however, the paper ends on another positive note by considering some of the exciting new developments that are now taking place in the discipline which will allow it to relate to more of the many worlds that make up geography’s vocation. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

My relationship with geography has been rather like that of a child with its parent: an underlying love but interspersed with periods of sulking and waywardness. I will leave it to the reader to decide which phase I am currently in!

One thing that the reader can be sure of is that I have no privileged insight into the future of Geography. What I do have is a reasonably broad knowledge of British human and physical geography – and a set of fairly strong (though not I hope rigid) opinions. What I will try to do is to put this knowledge and these opinions together to provide a kind of synopsis. Inevitably, that synopsis is very partial, strongly biased to the situation in Britain and even then to examples drawn from close to home. But one thing that struck me in writing this piece is just how many other convincing examples I could have chosen which would have been just as illustrative – one more testimony, I think, to the extraordinary richness of geography as a discipline at this point in time.

I want to begin this piece with the good news – all the things that I think it is possible to be justifiably proud of. And, as will become clear, there are a lot of things to be proud of. Further, as I will point out, the times are on our side: things are becoming ‘more geographical’. But not all the news can be good: I will also note some of the problems that are going to have to be faced in the next 10 years or so that should give us all some pause for thought. Then, in my concluding section, I will set out what I think are the most exciting intellectual developments currently going on in Geography on which I think much of our future depends. If I can convey even half the excitement that I feel about these developments, then I think I will have done my job.

2. The successes of geography

Let me start, then, with the undoubted successes. And I think there have been a lot of these of late.

Let me begin by addressing the topic of physical geography. Recently, physical geography has come out fighting and the battleground it has chosen has been mainstream science. In Britain, for example, there are now a series of science groups who are regularly getting their work in to the pages of Nature or Science in subjects as diverse as glaciology, geomorphology, Quaternary studies, and the like. This success is built on the basis of a different model from the one of everything model which tended to operate in the past. Now departments are trying to build up science groups of five or six good people and appropriate technicians who can then seek out large amounts of research money with which to fund equipment, postdoctoral fellows and

E-mail address: n.j.thrift@bristol.ac.uk (N. Thrift).
postgraduates. And the money they have been able to draw on has produced some spectacular scientific product. Let me point to just two examples. One is the exciting work currently being done in the Bristol Glaciology Centre by Martin Siegert and others on Lake Vostok as part of an international programme of research (see, for example, Siegert et al., 2001).

At the base of the Antarctic ice sheet, 4 km below the Russian Vostok research station, lies an extraordinary accumulation of water about the size of Lake Ontario – 230 km long, 50 km wide and as much as 500 m deep in places, hidden under about 4000 m of ice. The largest subglacial lake in the world persists despite surface temperatures that are regularly around –60 °C. Lake Vostok was discovered in the 1970s as a result of the use of airborne radar. The exact size of the lake was not able to be determined until the 1990s using satellite imagery. What is intriguing, of course, is what is down there. No one expects to find fish or other large creatures but there may well be numerous new bacterial forms which will have evolved in isolation for many hundreds of thousands of years, helped by life-giving geothermal heat, sediments and ice melting from above. The problem, of course, is how to get in to the lake without contaminating it. Russian drillers have penetrated to within 100 m of the lake, but then wisely gave up since the lake would have become tainted with the antifreeze which is used to lubricate the drill and to keep the hole above it from freezing. Martin Siegert and others in the international programme are working on solutions to bring pressurized, untainted samples of lake water to the surface. In all likelihood, the project will take several years. In the meantime, of course, the lake will continue to be studied remotely, using airborne radar samples, seismic experiments and satellite-based measurements. And, of course, Lake Vostok will not be the only focus of this kind of activity: so far another 69 subglacial lakes have been found in Antarctica with who knows what ecologies.

The other is the work being done on landscape evolution in geography at the University of Edinburgh by Mike Summerfield and his group using cosmogenic nuclide dating. This is a relatively new technique – available for only 15 years or so – which can date samples of minerals from $10^3$ to $10^6$ years, and which therefore allows dating to take place at the timescales that geomorphologists are usually most interested in (for a review see Greensfelder, 2002). Cosmogenic nuclides are produced in exceedingly small quantities by the interactions of cosmic rays with target atoms in common rock-forming minerals. Since they are only produced close to the surface and since the longer a rock is exposed the more nuclides it accumulates, they provide an ideal dating standard. But this is no straightforward technique. It requires very expensive instruments (a noble gas spectrometer and accelerator mass spectrometer), dedicated sample preparation laboratories and specialist technical support. Edinburgh is therefore one of the few cosmogenic nuclide science groups in the world. But it is repaying the investment in it by producing some remarkable results on erosion rates, including measurements of inselberg lowering and escarpment retreat rates, erosion rates on a passive continental margin, erosion rates in Antarctica, glacier fluctuations in the northwest Himalayas, and so on. For the first time, in some cases, it has become possible to put numbers to some of the classical geomorphological models.

A second success has been the increasing visibility of human geography. Human geography has been able to make its presence felt across the social sciences and humanities, buoyed up by a more general spatial turn which it has in part created. That spatial turn has produced a considerable interest in what human geographers are doing and a platform outside the discipline for them to show off their wares in the shape of the large numbers of interdisciplinary journals in which geographers now regularly publish. Just recently, I have seen papers by geographers in journals as diverse as Theory Culture and Society, Cultural Studies, Review of International Political Economy, Isis, and Political Studies. In turn, geographical journals also have a much higher profile. For example, according to the new Prestige Factor social science citation rankings, out of nearly 1500 journals, one geography journal is in the top 100, four geography journals are in the top 250 and 12 geography journals are in the top 500, a very creditable performance for a discipline which has many fewer journals than Goliath subjects like Economics.

Interest has been shown in a number of areas of work. Here I will have to mention just two. One has been landscape and nature. For a considerable period of time, work on landscape and nature tended to be of a relatively conservative cast, concerned with beautifully honed, largely historical pieces extolling the virtues or parading the vices of ‘classic’ landscapes, which were chiefly places in which nature was regarded as ordered and subservient or sublimely out-of-control. But in recent years both the type of landscape and the approach to it have changed. Human geographers have become much more interested in urban and suburban landscapes and the kind of nature to be found there. They have become much more interested in taking nature as not just a mirror of man but as having its own powers (hence the enormous interest in animals). They have recognized the key role of science as a means by which landscapes are both produced and culturally framed. And they have tried to work towards an ethic which might recognize the essentially mixed, hybrid character of the world, and the fact that what is ‘natural’ is a series of ethologies made up of things which are often quite unlike yet still function together.
One example of this kind of work is research by Sarah Whatmore of the Open University. She has been concentrating recently on the whole phenomenon of urban wildlife (see, for example, Whatmore, 2002). With a colleague at the OU, Steve Hinchliffe, she is now involved in a major study of urban nature in two large British cities. The project presents all kinds of problems. For example, cities are cosmopolitan habitats made up of many fauna and flora that may be neither ‘native’ nor ‘flagship’ species and so are not easily valued according to conventional scientific or economic criteria. And because British cities are currently undergoing something of a renaissance, the brownfield sites in which these kinds of species are thriving are coming under pressure. But what is especially interesting is the way in which the presence of these fauna and flora in cities is producing new lay and scientific knowledges of urban biodiversity which are challenging what is conventionally meant by nature conservation and care for the environment. In particular, the value of these fauna and flora for civic life (for example, as the focal point of community associations, various enthusiasm and expertise, and conservation, restoration and cultivation activity) is only just becoming part of a coherent political agenda.

The second area of work I want to point to is the general field of consumption. In retrospect, it is difficult to believe that until quite recently such a central element of human life could have been ignored (after all, we all go shopping) – but it was. However, over the last 10 years or so, human geographers, along with anthropologists, have probably been the leaders in work on consumption in the social sciences and humanities. In particular, I want to consider here the element of this work which has shown up how geography is a vital element of consumption through the so-called commodity chain approach. What this approach tries to do is to show the massive effort that has to be continuously invested in constructing the flows of the commodities which end up on supermarket shelves, so that each commodity now turns up with a kind of shadow geography behind it, a geography that has become more extensive, complex – and energy inefficient – over time. I will take just one example: the case of cut flowers. Geographers like Hazel Barrett and her colleagues (Barrett et al., 1999), Alex Hughes (2000) and Verena Meier (2000) have looked at the way that the cut flower industry links the shifting aesthetic tastes of western consumers (from the desire for new kinds of flowers to the growing global popularity of St. Valentine’s Day) with the flower fields of countries like Kenya and Colombia through an enormous global geography that constantly flies flowers to the flower markets of Amsterdam and on to supermarket shelves or, in some cases, directly from grower to supermarket. This chain imposes standards of presentation on flowers which have direct effects on the economies and environments of the growers and source countries, and on the aching backs of workers in the fields. In turn, geographers are attempting to make these kinds of commodity chain visible. So, for example, the geographers Ian Cook and Peter Jackson and the anthropologist Danny Miller are currently attempting to get the subject of commodity chains introduced into school curriculums, with the idea of using permanently sited webcams which would allow schoolchildren to see each part of the commodity chain, thereby not only registering the geography of the commodity but also making them think about their own role as responsible consumers since they are able to see exactly what labour they are in part responsible for.

A third success has been to produce a discipline with high skills levels. The rise of qualitative methods like ethnography and focus groups has been paralleled by renewed levels of sophistication in quantitative methods. Techniques like multilevel modeling, geographically weighted regression, microsimulation, data mining using generative algorithms, various Bayesian methods, and now the new sequencing methods taken from genetics, have produced new and much more subtle methods of analyzing large and sometimes incomplete or dirty spatial data sets, especially the large longitudinal data sets upon which so much attention is now being fixed. So, on one side, we have some fine ethnography being produced, whilst, on the other, we have new generations of work with very large-scale surveys. In some areas (e.g., the geography of health and health-related studies) it has even started to become possible to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches effectively.

A fourth and final success has been geography’s intervention in public policy, broadly understood to include involvement in the public realm as a whole and not just advising government and business. Geographers have been involved in activities as diverse as setting up banking facilities for the financially excluded and sitting on Royal Commissions on Environmental Pollution, advising on political boundaries and intervening in key economic debates, and even becoming (in the case of Doreen Massey) public intellectuals. Surely one of the most heartening outcomes of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise in Britain (see Research Assessment Exercise, 2002) must have been that the Committee of Users who looked at the body of research that was submitted that claimed policy-relevance (which included representatives from business, government and the charitable sector) all argued that they most appreciated considered research that told them something new, not quickfire work emanating out of consultancy. They wanted intellectual bite.

Again, I will use an example from my own department to show just what is possible. Professor Elaine Kempson and her colleagues in the Personal Finance Research Centre have become the leading figures in Britain on
matters of personal finance, working on topics as diverse as consumer credit, insurance, household money management, micro-finance and community re-investment. But, perhaps their best-known work has been on financial exclusion; the tendency for financial systems to deny access to people with lower incomes, often because there are no financial facilities close to them (see, for example, Kempson and Whyley, 1999, Collard et al., 2001). Here they have been instrumental in bringing the problem of financial exclusion into the public eye through a series of carefully researched reports – and in getting the British government to persuade the leading banks to offer basic bank accounts to anyone who wants them. Significantly, even in the first few months of its operation, hundreds of thousands of customers have signed up to these accounts.

But this was hardly a fly-by-night piece of policy-making. To have influence took persistence and stamina, as the saga of Elaine Kempson’s involvement with basic bank accounts shows. That saga began in 1997 with a meeting with the Social Security Minister and representatives of the leading banks to discuss widening access to banking. That meeting led to two linked studies which tried to identify the characteristics of people without bank accounts, and how that absence affected their lives. In turn, these studies led on to further work on the best ways of tackling financial exclusion. Elaine Kempson was then appointed to a Treasury team on access to financial services which gave the imprimatur to the idea of basic bank accounts. She then worked with the leading banks and the Post Office to design the new accounts. This phase included testing the basic bank accounts in one area of Bristol. In turn, the Personal Finance Research Centre became involved in a Financial Services Authority initiative to promote the new accounts, including even helping with the design and testing of new leaflets. Now Elaine Kempson has been seconded to the British Bankers Association on a part-time basis where she will have real influence. One of the interesting aspects of doing policy work is that it can lead to unexpected by-products. So work by Elaine Kempson that showed that the variable that had the greatest effect on not having a bank account was being in receipt of government benefits was an important stimulus to the government decision to pay all benefits and pensions by automatic transfer beginning in 2003.

3. The increasing relevance of geography

These four developments have to be seen against a backcloth of wider change which has made geography a peculiarly relevant discipline at this point in time. Take the case of recent geopolitical change. If nothing else, the events of September 11 and after have made clear that ignorance of the world is no excuse. Geographical knowledge is crucial. But the argument goes farther than simply knowing more about the world. These events have also underlined the need for producing new forms of ethic that will allow for peaceful co-existence on equal terms. And the literature on post-colonialism – which geographers have contributed so much to – is particularly useful here, seen as a series of meditations on what kinds of identities might be able to both assert their existence and reach out to others in a world in which crossing cultures has become normal and in which, as a result, very few cultures are therefore able to be described as separate, bounded and uniform. In particular, this literature, in its constant de-privileging of the perspective of the metropolitan subject, has developed a remarkable emphasis on the inter-weavings of geography as central to the decentralized world it is trying to conjure into existence.

Another change is also important. Geography is one of the few disciplines that is not dominated scientifically by the United States. Because US geography is weaker than many other US disciplines on the world stage, there is a certain room to breathe and develop other styles of academic work. So, for example, European human geography is gradually finding a distinctive voice based around a much greater emphasis on the contingencies and sheer hard work of constructing social systems and much less emphasis on the kind of hectoring theoretical stances that often seem to come from the United States. This does not mean that European geography is any less political but it is clearly trying to do political in a different way. Similarly, I think it is possible to see Asian human geography taking different kinds of views on the world, aware of what is going on elsewhere but also spinning its own stories.

Then there is one more piece of favourable background. The world is becoming doubly geographical. Like a number of other geographers, I now work a lot on the social impacts of new telecommunications technologies. What is striking there is how the geographical data and techniques needed to produce and track such telecommunications systems (the kind of data and techniques used by GIS, GPS, and the like) is itself becoming a part of the production of new and fast-growing geographies. I am thinking especially of all the different and thriving informational geographies, from the myriad interconnections of the world-wide web to the new possibilities of ‘hyper co-ordination’ arising from wireless technologies like mobile phones and radio frequency identification tags. In turn, these informational geographies are producing new geographical possibilities. Take the case of the automobile industry. Here a new spatial model of ‘distributive manufacturing’ is starting to take hold in which large numbers of smaller and very flexible assembly plants are being built close to the main nodes of consumer demand, replacing...
the old giant manufacturing plants. What we can see in examples like this are a whole set of new territories coming into being which we are helping to make and are also studying.

4. Some problems in geography

In other words, my argument is that geography is becoming more successful and at the same time, the world is adding new and exciting geographies that we can study. But, of course, not everything in the garden of geography is entirely rosy. It never is. I want to concentrate on four problems in particular.

First, and most importantly, human and physical geography are splitting apart. In part, this divergence is actually a product of success – as physical geography has moved firmly into the sciences and as human geography has become more markedly social and cultural some divergence was probably inevitable. Yet, you might have thought that plenty of common ground could still exist. After all, this is a discipline that stresses the environment and in which more and more people have become interested in Nature. But, in my experience, the divergence is growing apace. Part of the reason is career-oriented. Younger physical geographers see their salvation in the mainstream sciences and therefore tend to publish in the mainstream science journals like Hydrological Processes, Earth Surface Processes and Landforms, Proceedings of the Royal Society, Series A, and so on. In contrast, younger human geographers still tend to publish in human geography journals which have, as a result, become more markedly ‘human’ over time with the inevitable result that no younger physical geographer wants to put a paper in these journals since there is no audience. Another part of the reason is institutional. The content of other science subjects like Earth Sciences has become more like that of physical geography. Similarly, the content of other social science subjects like sociology has become more markedly spatial. So each part of the discipline is as likely to seek allies (co-researchers, etc.) from outside the discipline as it is inside it, especially in such interdisciplinary times. A final part of the reason is frictional. As divergence takes place, so common zones of understanding become rarer. In the past, for example, human and physical geographers had a common language in quantitative methods. But now this only rarely exists. Indeed, even those human geographers involved with quantitative methods tend to increasingly use methods evolved for the assumptions and needs of the social sciences.

There have been attempts at a new rapprochement, of course. So, for example, Doreen Massey (1999, 2000) has made strenuous efforts to bind the two sides of the subject back together by emphasizing how recent changes in scientific thinking (e.g., complexity) form a common ground for thinking about the nature of the world and for imagining new forms of space and time which do not rely on old-style models from physics. Similarly, a number of human and physical geographers have been meeting together to try to thrash out a new treaty in London. And the Annals of the Association of American Geographers has tried to partition the journal so as to guarantee more physical geography input. I have to say that I am skeptical about these efforts even as I support them. What I think is missing most is mutual respect and I think that that kind of trust is very difficult to build over the short-term. It will need a long-term institutional project which includes much more in the way of common knowledge bases than exists now.

A second problem that I still see as important is a certain lack of ambition and general unadventurousness. Some geographers would still, I suspect, like to hide away from these interdisciplinary days, spending large amounts of time considering histories of the discipline, circulating through the same old conferences and thereby generally confirming geography’s presence as themselves. I can think of nothing more lethal. My sense is that a modern discipline becomes good by constantly exposing itself to competition from the best across the sciences or social sciences or humanities. Nowadays a discipline cannot work by attempting to consolidate its own territory; there are just too many other disciplines interested in its domain and they cannot be kept out (as demonstrated, for example, by the increasing interest of earth scientists in problems which were regarded as in the domain of geomorphology or the increasing interest of economists in producing a ‘new economic geography’). So instead we have to go for a model based on respect for the quality of the work that a discipline produces: that is what will keep a discipline in business.

A third problem is a general decline in the production of learned books and monographs in favour of journal articles. The RAE 2001 Panel saw this as a problem in the UK, not just because it tended to signify a general erosion of longer-term scholarly projects (in contrast to some other disciplines) but also because it meant that geographers were producing too few of the kinds of books that could publicize the achievements and worth of the discipline more generally. Certainly, in the UK, learned books by historians and scientists (or at least popular science writers) regularly top non-fiction bestseller lists and do an invaluable job in popularizing those pursuits. Books by geographers should do the same. Whilst there are problems to overcome (and not least publisher conservatism), these are not insuperable.

The final problem is keeping geography buoyant in the schools. In many countries, geography in the schools
is in a fairly ragged state. It has been diluted by environmental studies or has to compete with other disciplines like history for the same slot. Large efforts are being made to reverse these situations and they surely deserve support. For without producing geography in schools, there will be no geography.

What seems certain to me is that the answer to this latter problem will involve a difficult balancing act. On one side, the intellectual integrity of geography needs to be constantly stressed. I am quite sure that it is vital to have a discipline which is acknowledged to be producing knowledge at the cutting-edge of developments in the sciences, social sciences and humanities (much of which, by its very nature, will be controversial and will necessarily be branded as ‘not geography’). On the other side, it is equally vital to be able, in these pragmatic times, to stress just how readily employable geographers are. The broad portfolio of skills that geographers have and their exposure to many different intellectual traditions make this a fairly easy argument to make. Certainly, in Britain, geographers are highly sought after by many employers for precisely these reasons.

5. Prospects for the future of geography

So where can I see geography going in the future? I think that geography is about to enter a very exciting phase, one in which the discipline will make some genuine intellectual and practical leaps.

I want to start by considering methods. I think the methods used in geography have generally been boring. But I think that the next five years or so will see a renaissance of methods, based on two main sources: large-scale computing and performance. Let me start with computing. Large-scale computing power is now becoming routine and it is starting to open up new research possibilities. In physical geography, we can see large-scale simulation becoming a way of life. But, in human geography, the possibilities have been counted to be less when they may actually be more. So, for example, it will be possible to analyse moving imagery like film and video evidence using advances in machine vision. It will be possible to use computers extensively in the field to supplement ethnographic or ethnomethodological enquiry. It will be possible to use virtual reality simulations which respondents can interact with and change. Web-based surveys will become standard, and so on. Computing will add an extra layer of flexibility and possibility to most social sciences and humanities research. Then there is performance. Human geographers have become increasingly aware of a set of knowledges of space and time which they had hardly registered before. These are the knowledges of how different layouts of situation, context, event, can produce different effects (including emotional charges) on those participating in and those watching them. A number of geographers are using performance both to extend how their own work is communicated, to investigate how many key modern spaces (from theme parks to shopping malls) impose their effects (which is often, ironically, through the application of knowledges drawn from performance) and to build new relationships with respondents. For example, it becomes possible to use knowledge of performance to produce other means of presenting research (after we all lecture, which is just one of the many kinds of performance that are possible), to analyse how and why certain spaces seem to have such powerful effects, and to co-produce certain kinds of project in ways which genuinely even up the terms of trade between researcher and researched.

And this leads to a second area of excitement. Both physical and human geographers are extending the registers in which they do geography and showing up different geographies as a result. So in physical geography, the appearance of new kinds of radar and new kinds of dating (such as the cosmogenic noble gas spectrometry I have already referred to) are massively extending the range of the world that we can detect. In human geography, something similar has been going on. So, for example, human geographers have become more and more interested in human senses other than vision – sound to begin with (there is a thriving geography of music) but now smell and touch as well. The emphasis on these senses has in turn led geographers towards trying to understand the geographies of all those currents and impulses that have so often been placed to one side of the human in human geography even though they define so much of what we are: emotions, certain kinds of deep-seated memory, the pre-reflexive reactions of the body (like the ‘half-second delay’), and so on. Human geographers are thereby making inroads into the world of a bodily ‘logic of sense’ that just as clearly runs how and what we are as does the logic of cognition and in doing so they are also showing how important space is in constructing this logic.

This leads me to a third area of excitement. Geographers are increasingly trying to communicate outside the standard textual forms. As well they should. After all, geography texts have always been full of maps and diagrams which betray an ambition to do more than words. Now geographers are experimenting with all kinds of representation that can expand the range of what can be communicated and what counts as communication. So, at one level, this has meant considerable interest in all the possibilities being opened up by developments in computing. On another level, it has meant taking an interest in media like film and animation which because of the digital revolution are becoming
cheaper and easier to use. On another level, it has meant a willingness to be much more open to different textual plays and formats of various kinds (as in the recent book I co-edited with Steve Pile, City A–Z or the journal, Soundings, Pile and Thrift, 2000). And, on another level, it has meant a turn to the kinds of performance knowledges I have already mentioned. I think what is mainly being attempted is to allow academic works to exist in a whole set of registers, as a paper, as a website, as a performance, as an installation, and so on. A whole series of echoes, each adding something to what is communicated, and to whom. In turn, this has led geographers in to all kinds of collaborations with people who have skills in these other areas. For example, there have been a series of collaborations in the UK between geographers and artists, a number of which have led to exhibitions.

Then, there is one more area of excitement that I want to mention. That is politics. I think we can start to see in the recent work of some geographers an attempt to outline different ways of defining the political and, in general, doing the kind of politics which can ‘deepen’ what we mean by political activity. What is being attempted is both to define new kinds of generous political engagement which ‘fit’ the kinds of complex, multivalent societies we increasingly find ourselves in, and to invent appropriate political practices which can appeal to and work across these many constituencies. Such expanded forms of political practice, often inspired by the writings of feminist geographers, should enable the growth of more variety in public life and they should also recognize (to come back to a topic already mentioned) the register of the emotions as an indispensable element of political thinking, understood as a kind of ‘visceral’ political thinking which we cannot do without. It is clear that space is intimately wrapped up in these attempts to deepen the political – in redefining what is meant by the public sphere, in fashioning spaces of participation in which generosity can be tested (but not too much), by making a critique of certain centred forms of authority while accepting that many traditions have strengths and by never assuming automatic harmony but rather accepting that there will always be a distribution of views and sometimes unresolvable conflicts. So we are living in an age of political experiments as more and more people attempt to practice democracy as much more than just the act of voting. Thus the experiments in participative planning, citizen juries, various forms of electronic deliberation, legislative theatre, theatrical forms of non-violent protest, halting attempts at economic democracy like time banks and local exchange trading schemes, and so on. Most of these experiments do not work but gradually, very gradually, they are pushing forward the boundaries of political practice. And, in doing so, they are also showing that geography can be a good citizen.

6. Conclusions

So, let me conclude by stressing just how central geography can be intellectually and practically to the world we live in. This is not a weak-kneed discipline. It is a discipline which, though stretched for resources and struggling with a number of problems, is going from strength to strength. And I like to think that it is doing this both with a certain amount of integrity and without reneging on the promises of interdisciplinarity.

Most of all, I think what is pivotal about geography now is that it has kitted itself out with the ideas and the tools to be able to recognize and to understand the myriad new geographies that are constantly being brought into existence. We live in a world of worlds: now geography has learnt to understand that fact and not so much live with as live for it.

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