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Text and Territory

Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages

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Introduction: Medieval Geographical Desire

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> Immediately there came into view a distinguished-looking lady, holding a geometer's rod in her right hand and a solid globe in her left. . . . "I am called Geometry because I have often traversed and measured out the earth, and I could offer calculations and proofs for its shape, size, position, regions, and dimensions. There is no portion of the earth's surface that I could not describe from memory."
>
> —Martianus Capella,
> *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*
> (fifth century)

In book 6 of Martianus Capella's *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, the "celestial senate" of the gods and the liberal arts listens intently to Lady Geometry's extended explication of the "precepts of her discipline" (218). On the one hand, hers is a descriptive, or geo-graphical, discipline dedicated to the empirical and verbal depiction of the contours of the earth; on the other, hers is also a mathematical discipline dedicated to rationalizing those contours into perfect geo-metrical forms. The interlocking of these two characteristics is expressed by the icons of her craft: the solid globe, a sign of Geometry's possession of complete knowledge of the earth's surface; and the geometer's rod, a symbol of intellectual order, whereby the earth's irregularities are rationalized by the instruments of human mensuration.

A servant brings to Geometry a third instrument, an "abacus board," which, we are told, "can represent the entire circumference and the circles of the universe, the shapes of the elements, and the very depths of the earth; you will see there represented anything you could not explain in words" (217–18).[1]

Figure 1. Detail (northwest [bottom left corner]) from the Hereford map, attributed to Richard of Haldingham, circa 1280; oriented to the east. Hereford Cathedral. By permission of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral.

A perfectly performing signifier, the abacus bridges the gap between itself and its signified, an operation, this text acknowledges, in which language inevitably fails. As a mechanism of absolute representation, the abacus performs tasks visible and invisible, superficial and profound; in revealing the "shape, size, position, regions, and dimensions" as well as the unseen "depths of the earth," it uncovers the hidden and exposes the concealed.

Jupiter, one of Geometry's divine auditors, exhibits a particular enthusiasm for the discovery powers of the geographical art: "Jupiter as well was eager to investigate all the hiding places on earth—for the reason, I suppose, that no beautiful girl of that epoch, either, might escape that lecher of many transformations" (220). Though the narrator's sly joke is directed at Jupiter's eroticization of the geographical process, it also implicates all who share the general desire to "know" the earth and to experience earth's innermost secrets. Lady Geometry is indeed a patron of the quest for geographical knowledge, but, Martianus here suggests, that knowledge always enjoys an element of control, of conquest, even of ravishment. Thus her art is one that is far from disinterested in its search for truth, for what is it she is asked, and is eager, to do? Not only to partake of the joys of abstraction and to smooth surface irregularities, but to penetrate interior enigmas, to master and possess. In short: to gratify geographical desire.[2]

In the Middle Ages, geographical desire appears in a variety of forms:

here, two examples will have to suffice. Richard of Haldingham's Hereford map provides an instance of optimism, perhaps even hubris, about the possibility of achieving geographical satisfaction. On this thirteenth-century *mappa mundi* appears the whole of the terrestrial world, laid out in its historical, fabulous, and contemporary multiplicity. Above the circle of the earth, Christ in majesty decrees the separation of the saved from the damned; below the earth's circle, as if analogously set, the Roman emperor Augustus hands a scroll to three surveyors, ordering them to take the earth's measure (Figure 1).[3] By means of these counterpointed scenes of division and allocation, the map declares the importance of geographical activity. It asserts the significance of empirical investigations in making the world secure for secular kingdoms as well as for the Christian imperium. This map informs its viewers that acts of territorial assessment and spiritual valuation are not alternative possibilities; each is necessary to secure the temporal realm as well as the eternal. So too the geometer's art involves not only the establishment of boundaries but also the estimation, and the achievement, of merit. Thus, in its representation of the dual ideologies of perfect knowledge and absolute possession, this particular "abacus board" performatively claims for itself the gratification of geographical desire.

In contrast, the 1448 map of Andreas Walsperger (Figure 2) exhibits great anxiety about achieving a precise alignment of secular and sacred mensuration.[4] Although it employs the same T-O form as the Hereford map, a form that has little concern with accuracy of position, this map includes a prominently placed, inaccurate, and utterly unusable mileage scale. Although traditional T-O maps are oriented toward the east, this map puts south on top, in the fashion of medieval Arabic maps, and incorporates up-to-date information gained from Arabic and Portuguese Atlantic and African coastal navigations.[5] The resulting clash of cartographic conventions—combining the vestiges of an earlier, unified, christianized vision with new technologies and empirical information—pushes the map off-center, both literally and figuratively.[6] Jerusalem is dispossessed of the cartographic midpoint and moved "up," toward the Arabic south; Africa, the southern continent, continues somewhere off the page, beyond the control of its European cartographer. Furthermore, because one of Walsperger's stated aims is to distinguish between Christian cities (colored red) and those of the infidel (colored black),[7] he is forced to acknowledge contemporary political realities: he must color Jerusalem black. Unlike the neatly framed Hereford circle, the world Andreas draws is disunified rather than multiplicitous, resistant to the regularizing art of mapping. This cartographic construction marks not the satisfaction but the thwarting of geographical desire.

Longings for geographical satisfaction have a lengthy history in West-

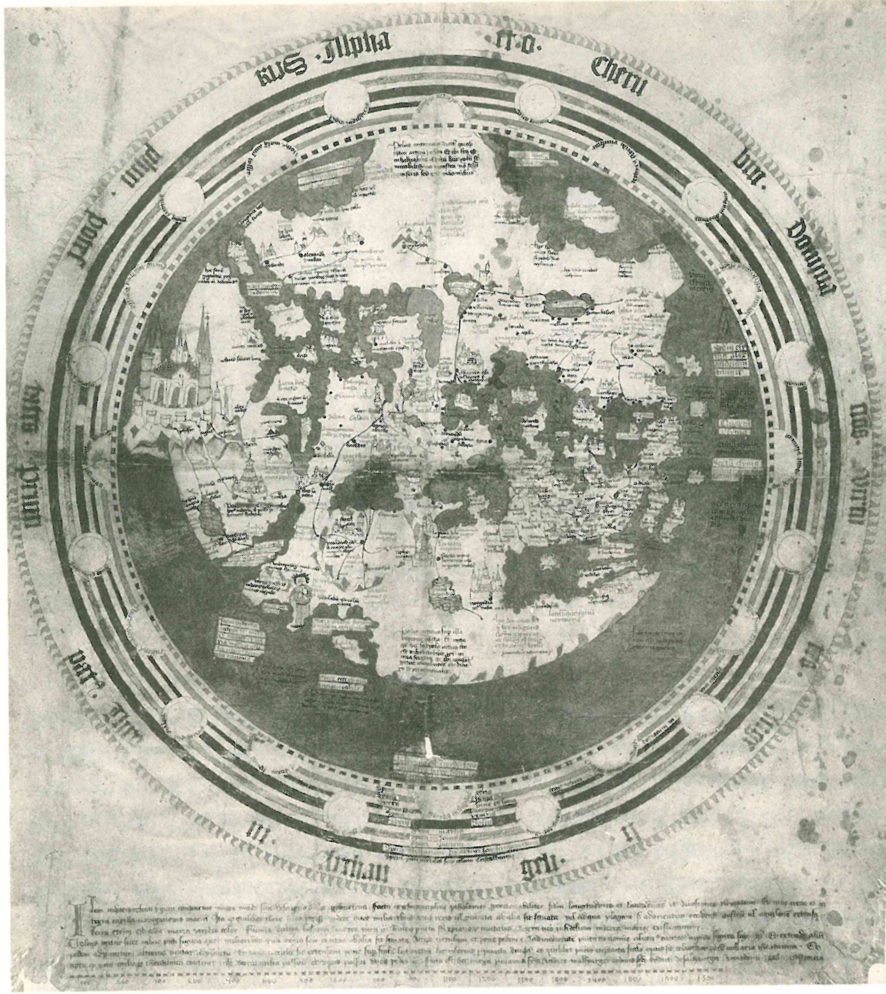

Figure 2. World map of Andreas Walsperger, drawn in Constance, 1448; oriented to the south. Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 1362b. By permission of the Vatican Library.

ern thought, even though, as in the examples above, the degrees of self-implication are often only partially expressed. A short parable by Jorge Luis Borges captures the paradoxes inherent in the cartographic ambition to measure and secure the contours of the world. In "Of Exactitude in Science," Borges writes of a culture whose College of Cartographers constructed "a Map of the Empire that was the same Scale as the Empire and that coincided with it point for point." However, succeeding generations found this great

achievement of Perfection "cumbersome," and the map was left to disintegrate, "abandoned . . . to the rigors of sun and Rain," so that finally "no other relic is left of the Discipline of Geography" (141).[8] Borges's bittersweet satire focuses attention on issues of representation and domination inherent in any geographical practice. It warns against the intellectual hubris of reifying the image with such precision that no space remains between the signifier and the signified, between the simulacrum and the thing itself—between, that is, the text and the territory.[9] By linking scientific construction with construction of the realm, the tale reveals the double delusion of geographers: to achieve exactitude and to replicate empire ("empirical" being the buried pun here). It thereby also reminds us of the political investment of any geographical undertaking, medieval or modern.

The contributors to this volume, conscious of the perennial attractions and the inevitable dangers of the subject, take as their collective task an investigation of medieval geographical desire. Building upon the insights of recent studies—particularly Gillian Overing and Marijane Osborn's *Landscape of Desire*, Mary Campbell's *The Witness and the Other World*, and the essays in *Discovering New Worlds*, edited by Scott D. Westrem—the writers here expand the range of medieval studies by employing feminist, queer, cultural, and postcolonial theories in specifically geographical ways. As literary scholars and historians, the contributors emphasize the inscriptive foundation of all geographical endeavor: "writing" is stressed as much as "earth"; "geo-" is completed by "-graphy." Hence our title, *Text and Territory*, which suggests a revalorized definition of "geography" as "the writing of the world." For it is the reciprocal interaction of two associated processes—the textualization of territories and the territorialization of texts—that perhaps most clearly illustrates the pervasiveness and potency of geographical desire. Through these processes, land is re-presented as territory, and works are surveyed, explored, located, and bounded; they become, as it were, texts.[10]

In their analyses of the reciprocal process of textualization and territorialization, the contributors to this volume evoke and extend the disparate facets of geographical desire already encountered. As in Martianus's paideic epic, the essays are concerned with the romance of discovery and the eroticization of the empirical; like the *mappae mundi*, they are interested in the politics of empire, the construction of signifiers of mapping, the relationship between centers and peripheries, and the problematics of alterity; and, as does Borges's fable, they explore the construction of texts that purport to embody their territories, as well as the discipline of geography itself. It may be helpful at this point to arrange these diverse concerns according to four concepts borrowed from Derek Gregory's *Geographical Imaginations*: "representation," "articula-

tion," "spatialization," and "authorization." These concepts, Gregory argues, are not only crucial "in the conduct of any critical project" but are particularly urgent "within the contemporary reconfiguration of human geography and the other humanities and social sciences" (103–4).[11]

The first concept, "representation," has two important components: First, it "draws attention to the different ways in which the world is made present, re-presented, discursively constructed" (104). Second, it "has a related, more directly political meaning that has to do with giving voice to the concerns and situations of others" (104). This process of "othering" is never neutral, however, and always works through "grids of power" (104). The writers of the first three essays in Part 1 confront the complexities of discursive representation in travel narratives, pilgrim accounts, and maps. Attending specifically to the implications of positionality, they explicate verbal and visual constructions of periphery and center.

In "'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita': The Palpability of *Purgatorio*," Mary Baine Campbell considers Dante's representation of the defining center, the "middleness" of images at the center of the central *cantica* of the *Divine Comedy*. In an analysis that recalls Martianus's Jove, she discusses the "erotic lure of geographical topics" in *Purgatorio*, a text that is simultaneously a love story and a travel account. Maintaining that its middleness is an aspect both of space and of narrative seduction, Campbell believes that the central canticle thereby fulfills what seems to be Dante's purpose in this portion of his text: "the journey between."

In "Defining the Earth's Center in a Medieval 'Multi-Text': Jerusalem in *The Book of John Mandeville*," Iain Macleod Higgins focuses on the diverse representations of Jerusalem in written as well as visual texts. Through his study of *The Book*'s numerous redactions, Higgins argues that this travelogue is analogous to late medieval *mappae mundi* that also imagine Jerusalem as the geographical and theological midpoint of the *oikoumene*. Like that of the Hereford map, Mandeville's geography is both textual and territorial, working to "claim" a Christian "domain." Higgins ends his essay by considering the ease with which the middle can be overlooked when reading a linear, end-oriented text—a situation that requires "compensation" to achieve "a fuller experience of the center."

Scott D. Westrem's essay, "Against Gog and Magog," is directly concerned with representational "grids of power" in the form of cartographic "othering." Surveying the "literal vagary" of Gog and Magog, Westrem argues that the unexpected cartographic juxtaposition of Gog and Magog with Asian Jews is a consequence of theologically inflected political events, such as the twelfth-century movement of the Mongols from the East. European territorial anxieties, combined with a Christian hermeneutics, lead, he believes, to the identification of Gog and Magog as an internal danger, rather than simply as a remote threat. Thus the center, the "transcendental point of reference,"[12] finds itself endangered by its own margins.

Part 2 explores the problematics of what Gregory calls "articulation," a notion "intended to challenge the sedimented division between the economic, the political, the social and the cultural" (105). To accomplish this, articulation "requires an identification of the modalities through which time and space are bound into the constitution of social life" (105). Each of the Old and Middle English texts under consideration in this part is directly concerned with discursive presentations of time (histories, chronicles, and genealogies) that simultaneously constitute their subjects in space (nations, kingdoms, and empires). These narratives of trade, colonialism, and conquest are each, in turn, situated firmly within a cultural, political, and psychological matrix.

In "Territorial Interpolations in the Old English Orosius," Sealy Gilles analyzes the Cotton Tiberius Bi manuscript to disclose the "cultural agenda" that authorizes the incorporation of geographical materials. However, in critical response to the tenets of contemporary anthropological theory, she argues that neither the alterations to Orosius's *History* nor the interpolated travel accounts of Ohthere and Wulfstan should be read according to programmatic expectations. When the Anglo-Saxon compilers contextualize the travelers' reports of alien geographies, they do not define the others as either exotic or demonic. Rather, the remote north and the customs of its inhabitants are neither recuperated nor marginalized but naturalized in the service of writing culture.

In contrast, Robert M. Stein, in "Making History English: Cultural Identity and Historical Explanation in William of Malmesbury and Laȝamon's *Brut*," shows that these later English writings, like Walsperger's map, reveal great geographical anxiety—in this case, concerning the post-Conquest amalgamation of diverse peoples and regions into one, English, whole. He links their apprehensions to their discourses of embodiment: the king's two bodies, the fragmented body politic, the translated relics of saints. William's aim, Stein argues, is to simplify "contested space" so that "geographical diversity is rewritten under the pressure of ideological purity." Laȝamon rewrites succession narratives as alliance narratives in order to transfer the notion of "identity of [royal] blood" "from time to space"; the poet thereby associates "legitimate sovereignty with a racially pure territory."

Christine Chism's essay, "Too Close for Comfort: Dis-Orienting Chivalry in the *Wars of Alexander*," fulfills Gregory's prescription to "challenge the sedimented division" between the cultural, the political, and (to add a term to

Gregory's list) the psychological. In the *Wars*, Alexander's battles necessarily juxtapose time and space: not only are his "conflicts of identity" transformed "into familial, political, and ideological ones," but his "genealogical conquests against his predecessors are reenacted as spatial and geographical ones." Chism also argues that the territorial anxieties within the text are linked to the specific spatial and temporal context of the English North West Midlands which provides for the production of the text itself. This translation of the deeds of the ancient (oriental) hero must therefore be understood within the context of contemporary, conflicted constructions of English chivalric identity.

In Part 3, the contributors pay particular attention to the concept of "spatialization." "Spatialization," according to Gregory, "refers to those ways in which social life literally 'takes place': to the opening and occupation of different sites of human action and to the differences and integrations that are socially inscribed through the production of place, space, and landscape" (104). A "double valency" of "space" is thereby implied: it is "coded in both physical and social terms" (104). The essays in Part 3 are specifically concerned with gendered and sexualized spatializations as a means and consequence of setting territorial boundaries; analyses of civic records, Icelandic sagas, Occitan lyrics, and a French romance reveal the complications of patriarchal geography.[13]

Jo Ann McNamara, in "City Air Makes Men Free and Women Bound," contends that urbanization in the later Middle Ages was an important force in the overall tendency to further restrict legal, economic, and spiritual opportunities for women. As towns became thoroughly spatialized according to increasingly rigid notions of gender, "anthropomorphized institutions," such as universities, "effectively barred women." According to McNamara, the enclosure of women was a general trend in many European cities; this trend, she maintains, is consistent with an ideology that "imaged a broad womanless space." Ultimately, therefore, the city can be understood as a paradoxical "instrument for the freedom of men and the containment of women."

Similarly, Margaret Clunies Ross, in "Land-Taking and Text-Making in Medieval Iceland," asserts that initial acts of settlement of Iceland and subsequent textual justifications are both differentially gendered. A new, sexualized social space is created through the processes of migration and colonization. In sagas and legal texts, space is coded as female ("domestic"), male ("public"), or sacred. Land is feminized, and female possession of land is accomplished communally, "through marriages and alliances." Land is also spiritualized, so that male territorial dominance is expressed not only individually, through "phallic display" and the symbolic "threat of homosexual rape," but also through "assertions of divinely sanctioned authority."

Gale Sigal also explores gendered territories in "Courted in the Country: Woman's Precarious Place in the Troubadours' Lyric Landscape," maintaining that the dichotomy between the lady of the *canso* and the shepherdess of the *pastourelle* is as equally dependent upon geographical space as it is upon social place. Only in the court is the *domna* protected, but there she is also silenced, for "inside castle walls, ladies don't talk back." Only in the country is the shepherdess free to speak, yet there she is vulnerable to verbal or physical violence. Thus it is the locations in troubadour lyrics where women are found (i.e., discovered, invented, and rooted) that determine their status, mobility, and voice.

In "Assault from Behind: Sodomy, Foreign Invasion, and Masculine Identity in the *Roman d'Enéas*," Vincent A. Lankewish argues for the primacy of territory not only in this text but in "medieval marriage practices" and "medieval constructions of gender and sexuality" as well. He links the conquest of territory to an expanded notion of "sodomy" (imputed to the Trojan invader by the queen of Latium), which includes military assaults, gender battles, and homosocial activities, all of which entangle the characters in conflicts of passivity, identity, and power. Eneas's newly conquered territory is thereby fully "eroticized," becoming the means to reinscribe male bonds, reimagine sexual relations, and transform the space of desire.

Part 4 is directly concerned with issues of "authorization," as set out by Gregory: "authorization is an attempt to make [the political] dimension more explicit by raising a series of questions about the inscription of subjectivity and the operation of power-knowledge: about the privilege of position, and about authorship and authority, representation and rights" (105). The final two essays explicitly examine the territories claimed in and created through—that is, authorized by—texts themselves. Analyses of Dante, Mandeville, and Ptolemy reveal that the politics of textual production, inscription, and reception are firmly linked to ideologies of representation, articulation, and spatialization.

My essay, "Judecca, Dante's Satan, and the *Dis*-placed Jew," examines the inscription of "Judecca," the previously unquestioned reception of Jews in the *Divine Comedy*, and the ways in which Dante articulates the conjunction of Jews and Satan in temporal and spatial terms. Asserting that Dante's paradoxical (non)placement of Jews at the midpoint of hell has been matched by their subsequent neglect by generations of *dantisti*, I argue that the reinforcement of exclusionist territories, both within and without the text, is part of an ongoing christianist hermeneutics that demands attention from medievalists today.

In the final essay of the collection, "The ABC of Ptolemy: Mapping the

World with the Alphabet," Kathleen Biddick shows how cartographic practices are dependent upon "technologies of temporality," which include astrolabical calculations, alphabetizations, and apocalyptic speculations. Texts as diverse as Ptolemaic maps, Hebrew-Christian disputations, and *Mandeville's Travels* ensure the "translation" of Jews "from time into space" so that they are "detemporalized" and "reterritorialized" as "old talmudic" phantasms. The fulfillment of Christian, European geographical desire results in a form of "colonization" by which, "guaranteed of origin, cartographic space could become timeless" and "cleansed."

As all of these essays show, geographical desire encompasses an extraordinary array of notions constitutive of Western thought. Geographical desire is revealed as eroticized (Campbell, Lankewish), gendered (McNamara, Clunies Ross, Sigal, Lankewish), and enclosed space (McNamara, Sigal, Tomasch); as narratives of centers (Campbell, Higgins, Tomasch), anti-Semitism (Westrem, Tomasch, Biddick), travel (Campbell, Higgins, Gilles, Clunies Ross), and conquest (Stein, Chism, Lankewish, Biddick); as strategies of cartography (Higgins, Westrem, Gilles, Biddick), genealogy (Stein, Chism, Clunies Ross), and temporality (Tomasch, Biddick); as crises of individual (Chism), urban (McNamara, Sigal), English (Gilles, Stein, Chism), and Christian identity (Tomasch, Biddick). However, perhaps the most salient point about geographical desire is that, as this multiplicity of versions illustrates, it can never be completely or finally gratified. In every case, the signifying fragment of desire "becomes an index of inaccessibility to totalization, or wholeness, the desire for which it repeatedly motivates" (Lowe, 98).[14]

But if "the very trajectory of desire [is] the push toward necessary failure" (Butler, "Desire," 374),[15] how then can "geography" ever be a satisfactory (if not a fully satisfied) "writing of the world"? It is my belief that only through the acknowledgment of inevitable failure will we be able to produce substantial textual/territorial inquiry. Modern scholarship—no less than the medieval texts it studies—has too often been motivated by the Jovian conjunction of discovery, dominion, and domination. By participating in such "empirical" constructions, however, medievalists may find themselves arriving at the same end as the geographers in Borges's story: loss of relevance, loss of value, and even perhaps loss of the discipline itself.

Like other cartographic productions, medievalists' mappings of the Middle Ages are necessarily fundamentally flawed. Judith Butler suggests that to desire is "to err, but to err necessarily and, perhaps, never fully with intention or guilt" ("Desire," 385). Perhaps, then, the best we can do is to create many, competing versions of the medieval world, for, as Borges cautions, no one map can encompass space-time "point for point." Faced with irreconcilable demands and expectations of politics and ideality, a totally successful

"writing of the world" is simply not possible. Despite cartographers' best efforts, therefore, there will always be land unknown. Yet, at the same time, it is only through the mediation between text and territory that we can begin to take the measure of the earth. Recognizing the complexities and contradictions of geographical desire, the contributors to this volume do not pretend to fix textual territories, to create an empire of medievalism. Instead we attend (to borrow Borges's phrases once again), "not without Irreverence," to the "Fragments of the Map" that we call "the Middle Ages."

Notes

1. Such measureless claims are echoed in Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, in his hyperbolical characterization of Geometry's art as "the art which spreads abroad the knowledge of mensuration and teaches its use, confines the boundless, restrains the wide-spreading, reaches the small, measures the great, examines the deep, dwells in valleys, scales heights" (113).

2. Other discussions of desire include Butler, "Desire," whose focus is on the psychosexual construction of desire; Young, who emphasizes the collective social constitution of Western desire; and Deleuze and Guattari, who analyze desire within the operations of global capitalism. In medieval geographical studies, see Overing and Osborn, who do not, however, theorize the concept.

3. On the Hereford map, see Cross, *The World Map of Richard of Haldingham*, and "New Light on the Hereford Map"; also Bevan and Phillott. On medieval maps in general, see von den Brincken, *Fines Terrae*; and Woodward. On T-O maps in particular, see Tomasch.

4. On Walsperger's map, see Gallez; Kretschmer; Durand; von den Brincken, *Fines Terrae*.

5. On the Arabic tradition of world maps for the period corresponding to the European Middle Ages, see Tibbetts; and Ahmad.

6. Walsperger's contemporary, Fra Mauro, "rationalize[d] his placing of Jerusalem away from the center" of his 1459 map "by stating that he [was concerned to show] the center of population" (Woodward, 317 n. 147). Cartographic historians have speculated about the off-centeredness that characterizes both of these transitional, mid-fifteenth-century maps, as well as those by Pirrhus de Noha and Andreas Bianco. Suggestions include economics (i.e., it was more important to depict significant trade relations than accurate coastlines) and stemmatics (i.e., Andreas deliberately or inadvertently deviated from the cartographic model on which he based his map). I intend to discuss the ideological implications of such off-centeredness at greater length in my forthcoming book, *The Medieval Geographical Imagination*.

7. The relevant part of the legend reads: "The earth is indeed white, the seas of a green color, the rivers blue, the mountains variegated, likewise the red spots are cities of the Christians, the black ones in truth are the cities of the infidels on land and sea" (quoted from Woodward, 325); see also von den Brincken, "Die Ausbildung konventioneller Zeichen."

Of Exactitude in Science

> . . . In that empire, the craft of Cartography attained such Perfection that the Map of a Single province covered the space of an entire City, and the Map of the Empire itself an entire Province. In the course of Time, these Extensive maps were found somehow wanting, and so the College of Cartographers evolved a Map of the Empire that was of the same Scale as the Empire and that coincided with it point for point. Less attentive to the Study of Cartography, succeeding Generations came to judge a map of such Magnitude cumbersome, and, not without Irreverence, they abandoned it to the Rigors of sun and Rain. In the western Deserts, tattered Fragments of the Map are still to be found, Sheltering an occasional Beast or beggar; in the whole Nation, no other relic is left of the Discipline of Geography.—from *Travels of Praiseworthy Men* (1658), by J. A. Suarez Miranda

I am grateful to Carlos Hortas for bringing this story to my attention.

9. Or, as Butler writes, "[f]ulfillment of desire would be its radical self-cancellation" ("Desire," 381).

10. On the textuality of geographical constructions and the geographicality of texts, see Higgonet; Smith and Katz; Duncan and Ley, "Introduction: Representing the Place of Culture"; and the essays in Barnes and Duncan.

11. For the purposes of my discussion, I have changed the order of Gregory's terms. Other important interrogations of the discipline of geography can be found in Keith and Pile; and Soja. For feminist critiques of geography, see Massey; Rose; and the essays in Blunt and Rose.

12. In *Travel as Metaphor*, Van Den Abbeele describes the *oikos* as "the transcendental point of reference that organizes and domesticates a given area by defining all other points in relation to itself" (xviii).

13. On the connections between gender, sexuality, and geography, see Massey; Rose; Blunt and Rose; Higonnet and Templeton; and Parker et al.

14. In *Critical Terrains*, Lowe's focus is on fragments of orientalism, but I believe the same case holds for geography as well.

15. Although Butler is speaking specifically of Plato's notions of desire in language, it is clear that the case can be made more generally.

I

CENTERS AND MARGINS