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**SPACE FOR CURIOSITY**

Curiosity – which the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines as 'a strong desire to know or learn something' (Pearsall, 2002: 351) – is widely affirmed today. In education and creative industries, ordinary workplaces and everyday life, it is portrayed as a good thing, worthy of encouragement and support. To cite just a few examples: one university has committed itself to 'encouraging, supporting and celebrating intellectual curiosity' (www.princeton.edu/campuslife/mission/ last accessed 10/3/2011), while another prioritises 'fundamental and curiosity-driven research' within its strategic plans (www.manchester.ac.uk/aboutus/facts/vision/2015goals/ 15/8/2011). An organisation that funds scientific and social research states that it favours projects that are 'driven by practical or intellectual curiosity' (Leverhulme, 2010-11: 14). And a media sales group has adopted the advertising slogan, 'Curious minds for surprising results' (McClellan, 2009). Meanwhile, the General Secretary of an academic trade union – the UCU, representing lecturers in the UK – has issued a statement asserting that 'curiosity-driven research ... has led to major scientific and cultural advances' (Hunt, 2009). This resonates with statements by scientists and scholars, ranging from philosophers to chemists (Phillips, 2010). Geographers, past (Wright, 1946) and present (Gade, 2011), have also spoken out for curiosity in more general terms.

In each of these statements, curiosity is celebrated, but also portrayed as circumscribed and constrained in some way, needing champions, who may liberate and defend curious people and practices. This raises an initial set of questions: How can we learn to be more curious? How can we teach and help others to be? How can we invest in curiosity? And, ultimately,

why is this worth doing? These, in the first instance, are practical problems. To address and answer them, I will suggest that it helps to think geographically, asking: how can we find and make 'space' for curiosity? This means identifying spaces in which curious behaviour is tolerated and curious people can flourish, while also acknowledging concerns that there are not enough of these spaces, and that not enough people have access to those that do exist.

But curiosity is not simply a practical problem. There is a contrast between the positive but flatly consensual tone and pragmatic focus of contemporary debates about curiosity, and more textured and ambivalent approaches to the subject in other times and places, notably early modern England (Ball, 2012; Benedict, 2001) and thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Spain, under Islamic rule (Sardar 2011). Today, according to philosopher Ilhan Inan, curiosity is typically assumed and sometimes affirmed but there is great resistance to examining it closely and critically (Inan 2012*:* 8). More textured, historical debates about curiosity do not always apply directly to the present, but they do set precedents for a more critical and searching engagement with the subject today. They pose questions about the meanings, ethics and politics of curiosity: about who and what curiosity is (and could be) 'for'. Taking up these questions in this paper, I develop a geographical framework not only for encouraging or endorsing, but also interrogating and reimagining curiosity or, rather, curiosities. I argue that, through the imaginative geographies in which curiosity is articulated, it is possible to critique contemporary assumptions about and cultures of curiosity. I suggest that curiosity has been constructed in privileged terms, and also sanitised and constrained; more inclusive and progressive, risky and dangerous curiosities are both possible and desirable. Thus, while I write for rather than simply about curiosity, I write for

and seek to develop a particular vision of what curiosity is and can be: one which is more searching and ambitious than the unexamined, glossed curiosity that has prevailed of late.

Charting space for curiosity, this paper draws widely and necessarily looks beyond the discipline of Geography. Academic geographers have periodically acknowledged and asserted the place of curiosity in geographical traditions including travel and exploration (Bravo, 1999; Naylor, 2002; Ogborn and Withers, 2004) and in disciplinary Geography (Sauer, 1941; Wright, 1947; Gade, 2011). However, references to curiosity in the geographical literature are typically fleeting and glossy: when mentioned, it is typically endorsed rather than examined. This contrasts with closer and more critical attention that has been paid to related terms, which include enthusiasm (Geoghegan, 2012); emotion (Bondi, 2005; Smith et al., 2009); inspiration (Metcalfe, 1999; Brace and Johns-Putra, 2010); enchantment (Bennett, 2001; Bhatti et al., 2009; Holloway, 2006; Wylie, 2009); and creativity (Christophers, 2007; Edensor et al., 2009). The limited direct geographical engagement with curiosity has meant that, in searching for a sustained literature on the subject, I have had to look to a wider and more eclectic literature, which is geographical without necessarily being the work of academic geographers, and from academic works to a wider set of sources including design manuals, mission statements, corporate communications and organisations' websites (Forster, 1993). A more explicit and sustained engagement with curiosity could be productive within geography, bringing a new perspective to geographical traditions such as travel and exploration, also to geographical pedagogies and research methods. But, while this paper will touch upon the history, philosophy and methodology of geography, the primary focus remains elsewhere: with ways

in which material and metaphorical spaces can be vehicles for encouraging and interrogating curiosities.

## Finding and Making Space for Curiosity

I began by raising a series of practical questions: How can we learn to be more curious? How can we teach and help others to be? How can we invest in curiosity? To begin to answer these questions, it helps to start by surveying the ways in which others have approached them, and by taking stock of the spaces they have mobilised to this end. I will draw a broad distinction between the spaces for curiosity that are purpose-built and set apart, spatially or temporally, and others that are embedded in everyday settings such as workplaces and streetscapes. These places function in a number of different ways and through overlapping spaces: they variously spark curiosity; are objects of curiosity; and provide safe spaces for curious behaviour that is not tolerated or encouraged elsewhere. It will ultimately be necessary to critique these 'spaces for curiosity', but in the first instance it is necessary to acknowledge and appreciate the diverse and often creative forms they take.

### Designing for Curiosity

A range of organisations and sectors, from universities to museums and from R&D units of manufacturing companies to small creative firms, have followed through on commitments

to curiosity by creating discrete spaces, set apart in some way, in which curiosity is tolerated and/or encouraged.

Universities are among the most vocal champions of curiosity. Commitments to 'intellectual curiosity' in teaching, learning and research have been formalised by management (e.g. http://www.princeton.edu/campuslife/mission/ 10/3/2011) and echoed by academic staff and their unions and professional and scholarly associations (Times Higher, 2009). For example, Goldsmiths, University of London, embraces curiosity within its strategy of encouraging 'creative, radical and intellectually rigorous thinking and practice' (http://www.gold.ac.uk/strategy/mission/ 15/8/2011). And Sally Hunt, General Secretary of the UCU, has defended curiosity and expressed the hope that universities can be 'spaces in which the spirit of adventure thrives' (Hunt, 2009: unpaginated).

Large academic institutions, many of which have inherited rather than designed the bulk of their teaching and research spaces, are often reliant upon bureaucratic forms of governance, and are organised into disciplines that compartmentalise knowledge, are not always genuinely good at accommodating curious people and curious behaviour. The stated commitment to curiosity, coupled with recognition of the difficulty in delivering it, has inspired a series of investments in new kinds of teaching and learning spaces. Working on the principle that 'space, whether physical or virtual, can have a significant impact on learning' (Oblinger, 2006: 1.1; see also Turley, Teare and Pinching, 2008), designers and architects are rethinking, redesigning and in some cases rebuilding classrooms, lecture

theatres, laboratories, libraries and the in-between and exterior spaces, in which learning and interaction continues (Den Besten et al, 2011; Parry, 2008). Doing so, they are implicitly responding to criticisms that conventional classrooms and lecture theatres constrain rather than enable learning, and are more like 'corridors' – narrow, constrained, linear spaces – than spaces for curiosity-driven learning (Heppell, 2008).

A number of common approaches and design principles are emerging in this context. First, efforts are made to fashion extraordinary spaces, removed from the demands and routines of the everyday, which spark curiosity. For example, one university has invested in a contemporary 'Cabinet of Wonder' known as BOX, consisting of display cases full of objects alongside electronic devices generating sounds and images (Harrison, 2006: 23.6). This choice of words signals a relationship with the 'cabinets of curiosity' that wealthy collectors assembled in early modern Europe (Arnold, 2006), and that have evolved into modern museums. The original cabinets contained objects that owners had collected themselves, received as gifts from friends and clients including trading partners, or commissioned from travellers and explorers. Curators and founders of museums, old and new, have suggested that these institutions have potential not only to display the fruits of collectors' curiosity, but also to encourage visitors to be curious (Gould, 2007). Boston Museum of Childhood, for example, aims to 'encourage imagination, curiosity, investigation, innovation, and play' (http://www.bostonkids.org/about/history.html 16/3/2011). Continuing this tradition, BOX 'blurs the boundaries between the classroom, the laboratory, the office, and the club' in the hope of 'encouraging creative behaviours and supporting innovation' (Harrison, 2006: 23.1; see also www.boxexchange.net/).

Other spaces for curiosity-driven learning focus not so much on containing tangible curiosities (objects), and thus being intrinsically curious, as on encouraging people to ask and develop questions. To this end, another university has commissioned a 'Learning Café' combining a 'mix of refreshments, social activities and IT' intended to cultivate a 'relaxing and friendly place where conversation and social interaction are seen as an essential part of learning' (AMA, 2012). A spokesperson explained: 'We spend a lot of time trying to change people. The thing to do is to change the environment and people will change themselves' (AMA, 2012). The Learning Café illustrates a broader theme in design for curiosity: creating fluid spaces, which encourage interaction and encounter. An educational design company explains this broad objective as one of facilitating a shift from rigid, hierarchical spaces, which are said to have rendered students passive, towards more flexible, fluid spaces, which facilitate play, interaction and innovation (AMA, 2012). Putting these principles into practice, the design team behind a next generation computer lab explain that they have aimed to create a space that would 'invite sociability, curiosity, and creativity' (Cattier, 2006: 8.1). This aims to provoke multiple forms of interaction, 'from having coffee with friends while talking about class to sitting at a table and reviewing class material with a professor' (Cattier, 2006: 8.1). Virtual classrooms have also been conceived as spaces in which to provoke new relationships between students (Blas and Poggi, 2007). The internet has become a 'learning space' in itself – a virtual classroom and a site for fieldwork (Dodge and Kitchin, 2005; Gerber and Chuan, 2000) – compatible with curiosity-driven learning (Lomas and Oblinger, 2006: 5.1). Software tools and websites – current examples of which include online interviews and discussion forums, Google Earth and Street View – are constantly

changing, increasingly allowing users to assume an active relationship with information, which is no longer simply downloaded, but is actively manipulated and interactively produced (Thorndycraft et al, 2009).

Many universities and academics have also tried to create metaphorical spaces for curiosity both within and between disciplines. In the face of concerns that disciplinary structures compartmentalise knowledge and close down avenues of inquiry, some scholars have asserted and defended their own curiosity, and worked to forge disciplinary and interdisciplinary spaces in which curiosity might prevail. In Geography, for example, Carl Sauer distinguished and practiced a 'focussed curiosity' (Sauer, 1941: 353) that others including John K. Wright (1947), David Lowenthal (1961) and Peter Jackson (1980) have endorsed and advanced. Wright, addressing the American Geographical Society in 1946, endorsed curiosity as the 'impulse that drives the astronomer to search the depths of the universe and the geographer to penetrate the mysteries of *terrae incognitae*' (1947: 4). In all these interventions, there is a sense of intellectual struggle. Sauer was a champion of curiosity, not simply an observer of it. Daniel Gade's recent monograph on the subject – a polemical volume, which celebrates the curiosity of some geographers and subfields of the discipline, while it condemns others for allegedly betraying their discipline's curious traditions – can also be read as a manifesto for curiosity. In keeping with the combative, 'immodest and forceful, exuberant and vivid, attention-grabbing' tone of the manifesto genre (Lyon, 1999; Caws 2001, xxi), Gade's account is something of a rant, but it bold and visionary nevertheless: *for* rather than simply about the space for curiosity.

Curiosity is also linked to creativity and playfulness. Entrepreneur and academic David Edwards, creator of a series of 'Art-Science Labs,' argues that creativity and innovation depend upon 'space to dream'. He takes inspiration from the MIT Media Lab, which engages artists, computer scientists, physicists, sociologists, game developers and others (Edwards, 2010; see also: Nicholson, 2008; Simon, 2001). In these laboratories – places set apart from daily life – it is possible to dream and to explore, playfully and creatively. So-called 'serious play' involves 'the challenge and thrill of confronting uncertainties' through improvisation and innovation (Schrage, 2000: 2). These principles have been put into practice in the creative industries (Savageau, 2008; Thrift, 2000), for example by media sales firm UM, which has created a 'Curiosity Lab' in its London office. Set apart from main working environment, this space is filled with interactive media and communication technologies that invite play and experimentation.

Similar principles have been applied to the design of another set of play spaces, in which curiosity, creativity, experimentation, learning and innovation are valued and encouraged (Sutton-Smith 1997). A study commissioned by the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), concluded that outdoor play stimulates curiosity in the environment and has benefits for mental and physical development and health (Bird, 2007); others concur (Joy et al, 2008; Coughlan, 2007; Goodenough, 2008; Milligan and Bingley, 2007). These findings have prompted schemes to increase access to outdoor spaces (Coughlan, 2007) and to design new play spaces, with the aim of encouraging children to be more curious (Louv, 2006) and to lead more active lives (Mackett, 2004; Munoz, 2009). *Mud between your Toes,* a programme launched in England in 2006, provides children with 'space in which to be noisy,

physical and exuberant and the freedom to be inquisitive, adventurous, innovative, creative and messy'. Learning Through Landscapes, a design group, explains that 'stimulating outdoor learning and play experiences for children and young people' can spark curiosity and inspire a 'new adventure in learning' (http://ltl.org.uk/ 11/8/2011). In one project, a 'small, uninspiring rectangle of barren tarmac' was transformed into a stimulating play space for small children through the use of natural materials, 'chosen to enhance the children's curiosity and provide both challenge and risk' (http://ltl.org.uk/ 11/8/2011; RGS, 2011).

A closely related set of principles and design ideas have been extended to and developed through children's museums, founded and/or reconstructed as 'centres of curiosity and imagination' (Pearce, 1998: 1). Some, including the Exploratorium – a revolutionary museum of the arts and sciences in San Francisco – and children's museums in Boston and Maine, spell out their aims to support the 'adventure' of learning and discovery (Shapin, 2010; www.exploratorium.edu 10/5/2011) and 'encourage imagination, curiosity, investigation, innovation, and play' (http://www.bostonkids.org/about/history.html 16/3/2011). Museum designers have used exteriors, interiors, orientation spaces, displays, permanent exhibits, temporary workshops and even picnic areas to stimulate curiosity. John Pearce suggests that an interior should 'promote the feeling of exploration,' as for example at one museum in which the arrangement of spaces invites visitors to 'swim upstairs' from the underwater environment created on the ground floor to the 'sky' on the first floor (Pearce, 1998: 34). Exteriors can also set the tone for what takes place inside, particularly when the architecture and setting dovetails with a museum's holdings, inviting passers-by

and visitors to wonder what may be found inside. At the Eden Project in Cornwall, England, 'distinctive domes on reclaimed clay mines' are conceived as more than a house for botanical exhibits, while the 'core' building 'takes its inspiration from a tree, with a central trunk and canopy roof that harvests the sun' and is 'designed to provoke curiosity and pay homage to the plant engine that powers our world' (http://www.edenproject.com/events-and-hospitality/venues-thecore.php 11/3/2011).

The organisations and actors discussed in this section vary, but their efforts to encourage curiosity assume a number of common forms, which in turn are a function of similar interests and approaches, coupled with their power to put ideas and principles into practice, through the resources, expertise and space they command. This poses questions about relationships between curiosity and power, which must ultimately be revisited. First, however, it is necessary to consider other spaces in which curiosity can be sparked and encouraged.

## Adapting Everyday Spaces

In addition to the dedicated spaces, examined in the previous section, everyday spaces can by catalysts for curiosity. For this to be possible, it may first be necessary to reimagine these sites, disrupting the normal flow of experience, which can be blinkered and routine, to create moments or contexts that are particularly conducive to curiosity.

In education, everyday spaces have been used to prompt curiosity, as a driver of inquiry-based learning. In *Émile: or, Concerning Education,* Jean Jacques Rousseau (1883 [1762]: 124) identified curiosity as an 'incentive' for learning, arguing that it can inspire a child to explore and inquire, widening his or her horizons (Segalen, 2002; Forsdick, 2000). These principles have since been explored through creative teaching practices (Lee, 2007) and formalised through pedagogical techniques including Problem Based Learning or PBL, in which students are provoked by exposure to objects or experiences, and then come up with problems and questions that drive their own learning (Bradbeer, Healey and Kneale, 2004; Pawson et al., 2006; Spronken-Smith, 2005). Most closely associated with medical training, PBL is also advanced in other disciplines and traditions, including geographical fieldwork, which breaks away from the routine of 'the more everyday classroom' (Nicholson, 2008: 29). With origins in outdoor education (Marsden, 2000; Ploszajska, 1998) and local surveys (Jones and Nelson, 2008; Layton and White, 1948), this tradition has recently been renewed through experimental fieldwork (Bonnett, 2012; Baillie-Smith, 2012). The UK's academic regulator, the Quality Assurance Agency, explains and endorses this approach. It states that: 'Geographers develop their geographical understanding through fieldwork and other forms of experiential learning, which helps to promote curiosity about the social and physical environments' (QAA, 2007; Phillips and Johns, 2012).

Projects to encourage curiosity within and through ordinary places have also been driven by a range of other interests and objectives. Research commissioned by the British Government has established links between curiosity and health and wellbeing (NEF, 2008; Atkinson and Joyce, 2011). These findings have been translated into a scheme to encourage

people to 'take notice' that has been piloted in Liverpool, where it is one of 'five ways to wellbeing' promoted through the city's Decade of Health and Wellbeing (http://liverpool.gov.uk/leisure-parks-and-events/Events/healthandwellbeing/ 15/5/2011). 'Take notice' is explained as follows:

> Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. (http://www.2010healthandwellbeing.org.uk/index.php, 10/3/2011).

The 'take notice' scheme encourages people to be curious about everyday places such as parks and streets by disseminating advice on how to 'take notice' (as one of 'five ways to wellbeing') and funding projects such as community photography and garden schemes, which are designed to put these principles into practice.

Finding space for curiosity in everyday settings can be a matter of contesting and revising the rules that govern behaviour there. This can be done by individuals and groups that challenge the written and unwritten rules they are expected to follow, or by those with authority over those places. In one explicit example of the latter, the Wellcome Trust (which funds medical research and showcases findings) has defined a space for curiosity, not so much through the physical layout or design as through a set of rules about how the space should be used. Henry's – which is really just a small library for grant-holders, with tea and coffee making facilities – is subject to a series of rules, which users are asked to sign up to:

> Henry's Terms

- Henry's is a community of like-minded individuals, incurably curious about medicine, life and art.
- It is a melting pot for extraordinary ideas, knowledge and connections.
- Henry's unites those with genuine enthusiasm about the Wellcome Collection and the Wellcome Trust.
- Henry's Room is a space for hubbub and conversation rather than silent study.
- It's an environment where members can meet, innovate, learn and relax.

Many thanks.

Similarly, in museums, curators do not stop with innovative architecture and exhibits, but also think about the ways in which those spaces can be brought to life. The Exploratorium was one of the first to allow and encourage young visitors to be playful and noisy, running around and behaving as they might do outdoors (Pearce, 1998). Other children's museums, which have followed this model, also invest in workshops and events, engaging visual artists, dancers, puppeteers and performers for this purpose (Ledgard, 2008). Boston Children's Museum makes it a priority to '[get] objects out of cases and into children's hands in exhibit areas where children [can] interact, experiment, and follow their own curiosity' (http://www.bostonkids.org/about/history.html 16/3/2011). Other organisations have implemented schemes to encourage curiosity among workers, clients, visitors and others. Curiosity Inc. – a firm of consultants, based in Toronto – runs curiosity workshops for client firms, which seek to unlock the curiosity and creativity of staff (http://www.curiosityinc.com/index.html 12/8/2011). UM sends employees on fieldtrips,

designed to generate innovation and creativity. And the Eden Project runs internal events, designed to encourage staff to stay curious at home and work. Workers are encouraged to be open to new ideas and broad in their interests and to demonstrate this by reading at least one new book or watching one new film each month, and coming to their team meeting ready to discuss it (Smit, 2009). Effectively, these organisations are allowing, encouraging and sometimes pressuring people to be curious, and turning a range of settings into spaces for curiosity.

Space for curiosity is not only handed down or imposed from 'above' though. Individuals and groups, acting more autonomously, also find and claim their own spaces in which to be curious. Today, for many people, curiosity leads in the first instance to gadgets: turning on a mobile phone or laptop, whether to find information or to find out how to find it, and sometimes to manipulate, upload and share this through social networking and other websites. The rise of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) appears to fulfil a vision, set out a generation ago by Michel Foucault (1988). He hoped that the multiplication of 'bridges' and 'means of information' would transcend traditional channels of communication such as print media, which had been 'too narrow, almost monopolistic, inadequate,' and it would multiply the flow of information 'backwards and forwards' (Foucault 1988, 328).

Alongside the democratised spaces of curiosity envisioned in the new information society, a number of more conventional pathways for curiosity such as travelling and visiting

museums, and attending courses and classes in schools and universities, have not only survived, but proliferated (e.g. Hudman and Jackson, 2003). Of course, not all travellers are curious about where they are going; many tourists are simply in search of a break from routine and a place to relax, and many migrants have more pressing concerns about their survival and livelihood. But, for those who are curious, one of the most obvious things to do is to go somewhere new or unfamiliar or, failing that, to consume accounts of other peoples' journeys, or fictional accounts of their travel in real places. The association between curiosity and travel is illustrated in the advertisement for a frequent flier scheme, shown in **Figure 1**, and is elaborated in critical readings of travel narratives and fictions (Leask, 2002; Reid, 2009). Curious travellers have been inspired and informed by the proliferation of guide books and travel websites, some of which specifically encourage curiosity in the places visited, whether these are far away or closer to home (Gooley, 2012).

**Figure 1**

In addition to guidebooks to specific places, a number of more generic, experimental books and manuals have been devised, which share an interest in de-familiarising everyday settings, and thereby creating space for curiosity. In *How to be an Explorer of the World* (2008), Keri Smith presents exercises that include documenting 'parts of a building that most people ignore' and going round a room in the dark then identifying it by touch (Smith, 2008: 64). The Geography Collective present a range of missions, adventures and exercises in a book for younger readers. For example: 'Play hide in shop. Go to a shopping centre and

play hide-and-seek. Which are the best three shops to hide in?' (Geography Collective, 2010: 145; **Figure 2**). Similar missions are advanced in *The Lonely Planet Guide to Experimental Travel* (Antony and Henry, 2005) and O*h comely* (2010), a 'magazine about people and their quirks', which 'inspires people to be creative, talk to their neighbours and explore new things, rather than buy stuff or lose weight' (http://www.ohcomely.co.uk/about.php, 20/4/2011).

Spaces for curiosity can be shared spaces, which involve interaction, and a sense of being curious together. Explicit examples of this include events organised by Jane's Walks, a group named after Jane Jacobs, the urbanist and critic of modern city planning (http://www.janeswalk.net/about 17/8/2010; see also Geoghegan, 2012). These walks explore the social and collective dimension of curiosity, in which people are not simply curious about the space itself, but also about each other, within and through this space. Another example of collective curiosity, in and through ordinary places, is provided by Conflux, a festival that takes place in New York. This includes walks, tours, bike and subway expeditions, designed to re-imagine the city as 'a laboratory for creative experimentation and civic action' (confluxfestival.org 2/6/2010; Pinder, 2005). Interventions such as Conflux and the Geography Collective's missions work within and renew a political tradition, which is often traced to Psychogeographers and the Situationist movement, and also encompasses local surveys (Layton and White, 1948) and urban expeditions (Bordessa and Bunge, 1975; Merrifield, 1995). They politicize both the struggle for space in which to be curious, and the projects of cultivating curiosity within and through places. They show that finding and claiming space in which to be curious, and asserting one's curiosity, is not simply a practical

problem. It can also be a cultural, intellectual and/or political struggle. This raises questions about the politics of curiosity, which are addressed in the next section.

**Figure 2**

This and the previous section have traced a series of different meanings of 'spaces for curiosity,' beginning with dedicated spaces, then considering ways in which ordinary, everyday places can be recast (perhaps for limited periods of time, or in special circumstances) for this purpose. Largely between the lines of this discussion, questions about power and agency have emerged, through an acknowledgement that spaces of curiosity do not just exist, but are created and controlled, contested and mobilised. Relationships between spaces of curiosity and questions of power are brought into focus in the next section by revisiting a more fundamental space in which curiosity is conceived and understood – *terra incognita*.

## Interrogating Curiosity: *Terra Incognita*

By reflecting on – not simply surveying and mapping – the conceptual space in which curiosity is imagined and articulated, it is possible to push debates about this subject harder, towards more critical questions about relationships between curiosity, social relations and power. The articulation of curiosity through *terra incognita*, in particular, shifts the debate

from practical and apparently unproblematic questions about how to encourage curiosity into more challenging debates about what curiosity is, who can be curious, and what curiosity is and can be for.

Curiosity is widely portrayed as an encounter with *terra incognita*. As Helga Nowotny puts it, 'curiosity aims to explore a space that may still be furnished for us' (Nowotny, 2008: 3). And, in a book about curiosity in the scientific imagination, physicist Sander Bais develops this spatial metaphor, arguing that scientists must not be afraid to 'go *through this or that door*' and enter '*new territories'* (Bais, 2010: 21). Barbara Benedict elaborates on the idea of curiosity as exploration, comparing 'the thirst for information' with 'the quest to penetrate forbidden areas' and 'the ambition to go beyond' (all quotations: Benedict, 2001: 254). Going beyond, while sometimes metaphorically spatial, can also be literally so. It was the desire to go beyond Europe in the early modern period and the acts that followed – exploration, travel and adventure – that prompted serious debates about curiosity (Benedict, 2001; Leask, 2002). Bais presents Columbus as a role model for scientists today:

> We must be grateful to courageous explorers like Christopher Columbus, who were the first to put the spherical-earth hypothesis to a real test when they kept sailing West, hoping to find an alternative route to the Far East. We all know that they never made it there, but discovered America instead, making an accidental discovery that has nothing to do with their original research goals. As a matter of fact the great explorers were courageous indeed, because even on a spherical earth you could drop into a hole or slip off the side. (Bais, 2010: 40-41)

*Terra incognita* and explorers are also prominent in accounts of specifically geographical forms of curiosity. Gade applauds a series of explorers as 'exemplars of the inquisitive spirit' (Gade, 2011: 22), 'notably curious individuals' (Gade, 2011: 23), who are 'among the most brilliant of highly curious people that Western civilization has produced' (Gade, 2011: 29). Curiosity is also recognised within closely related geographical traditions including travel and adventure (Leask, 2002). Miles Ogborn and Charles Withers (2004) find a mixture of wonder, curiosity, uncertainty and scientific method in early modern maps and cartographies, while Michael Bravo (1999) traces 'precision and curiosity in scientific travel' of the same period (see also Naylor, 2002; Naylor and Ryan, 2010; Thomas, 1994). In the fields of exploration, travel and adventure, non-fictions and fictions converge. Jules Verne's adventure story, *Around the World in 80 Days* (1872), has appealed to generations of curious readers, while it also depicts curiosity through its narrative and characters: Phileas Fogg and his French servant and travelling companion, Jean Passepartout (Clout, 2008; Phillips, 1997).

But explorers and travellers such as Columbus and Fogg were exceptional and unusual figures. This raises fundamental questions about the curiosity they represent.

## Who can be curious?

The explorer presents a problematic picture of curiosity. There are five main reasons for this. First, European explorers are closely associated with colonial and other unequal power relations, and as such they are problematic symbols of curiosity and models for curious

endeavours. Gregory Ulmer observes that 'the image of the ship carrying explorers to the "new world" has served as the chief metaphor of research in Western civilization' but is no longer tenable, at least as a positive model, and this has 'implications for science' (Ulmer, 1994: 24). Columbus's enduring status as a curious hero raises questions about the power relations and consequences of curiosity, both for curious subjects and also for the objects of their curiosity: things, people and places that are seen as curiosities. Second, Columbus and the narrative of discovery and exploration in which he features also present an implicitly gendered – masculine – picture of curiosity. Each of the 'notably curious individuals' identified by Gade (2011: 23) – ranging from Herodotus to Benjamin Franklin and from Alexander von Humboldt to Carl Sauer – were of course men, whose masculinities took different forms but can all be located within gendered traditions of exploration and adventure (Phillips, 1997). Third, like other western explorers, Columbus presents a specifically embodied – able-bodied and quintessentially mobile – picture of curiosity. This model of the curious subject is routinely invoked and typically taken for granted. Rousseau's Émile, the archetypal curiosity-driven learner, depends upon his five senses, but particularly his eyes. More generally, curiosity as it is commonly understood today is associated with some people and bodies – particularly those with good eyesight – more than others, despite commonplace assertions that curiosity is innate in humans and universal among children. Fourth, like most other famous explorers, Columbus was a privileged figure, who commanded the resources required for an ambitious expedition, and the license – granted in his case by the Queen of Spain – to undertake these grand voyages. Fifth, and finally, the explorer is typically portrayed in individualistic terms, even though exploration is always a collective endeavour.

In making these points, I am not simply taking another swipe at certain dead white men, those usual suspects, who cannot defend themselves! Rather, I seek to problematize contemporary understandings and cultures of curiosity, which are imagined through the lens of figures such as these. Moreover, I will go on to complicate this reading of the reciprocal relationships between exploration and curiosity, and to argue that while explorers present problematic pictures of curiosity for the reasons outlined above, they can also be insightful and useful in other ways.

Many of the cultures of and spaces for curiosity, discussed in this paper, have been skewed in some of the same ways as Columbus's expeditions, through their associations with power and with male, able-bodied, privileged curious subjects. It would be too sweeping, and unfair on the individuals and groups that have deliberately tried to create more inclusive spaces for curiosity, to conclude simply that curiosity remains the privilege of a minority; however, I have illustrated that many contemporary spaces for and conceptions of curiosity are directed at specific groups and outcomes, such as students and researchers in higher education institutions, and professionals within the creative industries. Meanwhile, others including manual workers and elderly people may be left out or marginalised within contemporary cultures of curiosity.

Questions about who can be curious have also been framed more critically and positively, though, for example through projects and schemes to cultivate more inclusive and

democratic forms of curiosity. The language of curiosity-driven exploration is reclaimed – removed from imperial moorings – in some of the projects and books introduced above, notably Keri Smith's *How to be an Explorer of the World* (2008) and Tristan Gooley's *Natural Explorer* (2012). The latter takes inspiration from explorers such as Alexander von Humboldt and Ludwig Leichardt but then advocates a less grand, more local model of exploration. Curiosity is not only being purged of colonial dynamics, but actively mobilised within postcolonial projects. In a study of Islamic Cordoba, Zia Sardar (2011) argues that mutual curiosity, sparked by encounters between peoples of different faiths and backgrounds, can be mobilised as a source of 'wonder' and tolerance. Developing this argument along broader lines, Sennett (2012) suggests that curiosity in the lives of others can be a source of empathy and, in turn, cooperation, and thereby illustrates how curiosity can be framed non-intrusively, reciprocally and progressively. Efforts have also been made to make cultures and spaces of curiosity more inclusive. RSPB reserves and outdoor learning spaces meet and regularly exceed legislative requirements with respect to disability access, for example. Geographical fieldwork practices, also criticised for reproducing heroic and masculinist traditions of learning (Rose, 1993), are being reinvented to become more accessible to people with mental and physical disabilities (Chalkley and Waterfield, 2001; Hall et al, 2004). Other schemes to democratise spaces for curiosity include Eden's curiosity workshops (mentioned above) and Liverpool's Decade of Health and Wellbeing, which focusses its limited budget on communities affected by multiple forms of deprivation.

Positive interventions such as these illustrate how criticisms of cultures of curiosity, including the criticisms advanced above with reference to explorers and encounters in *terra*

*incognita*, have provided points of departure from which to reach towards critical, practical understandings of curiosity. They identify criteria and set standards by which to measure and extend cultures of curiosity, which reach out more widely than they have done in the past and – as the previous sections illustrate – than they often do in the present, with greater sensitivity to questions about who can be curious (and who cannot, so easily). More fundamentally, they develop the claim, raised earlier, that finding and making space for curiosity is not simply a practical problem; it is also a struggle, and one with cultural, intellectual and in some cases political dimensions.

Answers to the question of who can be curious are, in part, an outcome of struggles by individuals and groups to assert their curiosity. Sennett argues that many workers on construction sites, in hospitals, shops, factories and other workplaces are denied the space in which to be curious. This is despite the potential productivity gains and reduced staff turnover that can come when they are given the license to identify problems and devise solutions in the course of their work. He notes, however, that some workers assert their curiosity and he calls for more employers to allow them this freedom, remaking the workplace as 'a free space in which people can experiment, a supportive space in which they could at least temporarily lose control' (Sennett, 2008: 114). Meanwhile, academic unions are fighting to keep this space open for their members by reasserting the value of curiosity-driven research (Hunt, 2009; Pain, Kesby and Askins, 2011) and individual academics are contesting the push towards systems of regulating and rewarding research that allegedly squeeze out intellectual curiosity (Phillips, 2010), in the context of broader critiques of and resistance to the neoliberal knowledge economy (Smith, 2010; Staeheli and

Mitchell, 2005). These interventions underline the significance of developing critical perspectives on curiosity, not simply to ask who curiosity is for, but who it could be for.

## What is Curiosity For?

While explorers such as Columbus present problematic pictures of curiosity, these ambivalent and provocative figures should not simply be dismissed. What they retain, and what many of their contemporary, more sanitised counterparts seem to have lost, is an understanding of the real risk and danger, and with it the open-ended possibility, that can be associated with curiosity. Explorers symbolise a vital and powerful hunger for knowledge and a determination 'to penetrate forbidden areas,' regardless of what may lie there and who or what this 'ontological transgression' may offend (Benedict 2001, 254).

In contrast with the apparent vitality of explorers such as Columbus, many of the contemporary schemes to find and make space for curiosity, discussed throughout this paper, contain rather than embrace risk and danger. The rationale for this takes different forms but revolves around making curiosity useful and controllable. I have illustrated, for example, how curiosity is recognised as a vehicle for formal and informal learning, and that this has been acknowledged widely, by individuals and organisations ranging from Rousseau to the QAA, and by many contemporary teachers and lecturers (Phillips, 2012; Phillips and Johns, 2012). Curiosity has also been identified as a driver of innovation (Edwards, 2010), particularly in creative industries (McClellan, 2009) and higher education. It has also been encouraged as pathway to health and wellbeing, informing schemes such as the five ways to

wellbeing. It has also been seen as a catalyst for active citizenship, social responsibility and care. Foucault suggested that curiosity 'evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist' (Foucault, 1988: 328). Thinking along these lines, museums have been conceived, founded and curated as centres of curiosity and imagination (Pearce, 1998) with the hope of cultivating interest in science and the arts, and fostering active citizenship (Cole, 2009; Shapin, 2010). Surveys and field trips have been designed around similar principles (Layton and White, 1948), as have university curriculae, which are said to prepare students for 'active citizenship' and 'ethical leadership' (http://www.princeton.edu/campuslife/mission/ 10/3/2011).

But it is not necessarily compromising for curiosity to be 'for' something. The dichotomy between pure and applied, vital and diluted curiosity does not stand up to scrutiny. Explorers, for example, have acted for a range of reasons that go beyond sheer curiosity, from the prospects of opening up resource frontiers and trade routes, to the hope of advancing knowledge and understanding (Driver, 2001). Others, equally motivated by the possible outcomes of their curiosity, are more concerned with things like learning, health, creativity and responsibility. Ilhan Inan questions the idea of 'sheer curiosity' and argues that curiosity is always value-driven, such that we are curious about what we care about: 'We have an interest in certain topics, and we care to know more about them. It is this kind of interest that motivates us to reflect on our ignorance, and only then we become curious. So, in this sense, curiosity is value-laden. We are only curious about things that we are interested to know' (Inan 2012: 183). This echoes the etymological association between curiosity and care, noted by Philip Ball, and the connection between these terms, discussed

by Foucault, who argued that curiosity 'evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist' (Foucault 1988 [1980]: 327). From this perspective, curiosity is never 'pure' and is always committed in some way. This means that it is possible to be interested in the outcomes of curiosity without surrendering the vitality of curiosity, which is symbolised in the figure of the explorer.

The explorer celebrated by Sander Bais, though interested in gold and glory, was also an awkward figure, whose royal patronage did not stop him from asking difficult questions. For Bais, curiosity leads not only to new knowledge but also to intellectual ambition, which brings possibility but also danger and trouble. 'All children run into self-proclaimed authorities like parents who keep telling them in solemn voices that it is strictly forbidden to go *through this or that door*, because something horrible could happen.' he writes (Bais, 2010: 21). 'But if you overcome authority and curiosity does drive you into *new territories*, then you are faced with new questions: "How do we know what we believe?" and: "How reliable are our observations?"' (Bais, 2010: 25-26). This can unsettle relationships and hierarchies. Curious children challenge parents and teachers; intellectuals challenge religious and secular authorities; scientists challenge each other; and, perhaps most importantly, curious people challenge and interrogate their own ideas and assumptions. This is why curiosity is widely and accurately regarded as a threat to the established order of things, and why curious individuals are variously seen as 'upstarts' who challenge for positions of power (Benedict, 2001) or subversives (Sennett, 2008: 114) who show 'a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies' (Foucault 1998: 328).

And, while genuine curiosity may unsettle established interests, it can also be uncomfortable for the curious person him or herself, since it means embracing risk and confronting danger. Rebecca Solnit expresses this as a form of seduction, a letting-go, 'a psychic state achievable through geography' (Solnit, 2006: 6). She suggests that we 'Leave the door open for the unknown' (Solnit, 2006: 4). There is nothing easy or straightforward about this. Psychologists place curiosity on a continuum that reaches from positive states of excitement to negative states of anxiety (Voss and Keller, 1983; Loewenstein, 1994; Kashdan, Rose and Fincham, 2004). And, as Victoria Reid argues in a study of the notoriously curious traveller, André Gide, 'the perfectly curious state is precarious; it can become overwhelming' (Reid, 2009: 46).

The disruptive, anarchic, unpredictable side of curiosity has also been discussed by cultural critics and moral philosophers, and also embroidered and explored by writers and poets, all of whom have reflected upon the ways in which this can be unsettling, both for the social order and the curious subject, and dangerous for all those who are brought into curiosity's sphere (Benedict, 2001). In *Paradise Lost*, for example, Milton interrogated the moral implications and consequences of the desire to explore, see and know the world, in a context where the desire for knowledge was not assumed to be intrinsically or universally a good thing (Brantlinger, 1972). And in *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad's fin-de-siecle, dystopian story, curiosity drives a story that begins with a curious boy, staring at a sketchy and largely blank map, and ends with an adventure that proves tragic, not only for him but also for the real people and places he encounters: the Africans drawn into colonialism's

brutal sphere (Conrad, 1899). Works such as these acknowledge the ambivalence – the appeal but also the danger – of curiosity and the adventures to which it can lead.

The disruptive and dangerous possibility of curiosity helps to explain why, despite all the positive things that are said about it, curiosity is not always embraced. Why, for example, academic regulatory agencies such as HEFCE (the Higher Education Funding Council for England) should have tried to constrain (or acted as if they were trying to constrain) academic curiosity (Hunt, 2009). Also, why many employers deny most of their workers the space in which to be curious, and limit the ways in which others are curious (Sennett, 2008). And why many schemes, which claim to open up space for curiosity, tend to do so in limited ways. The challenges of deep curiosity – of surrendering to a kind of 'seduction' (Solnit, 2006: 6) – also help to explain why many people prefer not to be curious, or not to be curious all the time, or everywhere. Many teachers and lecturers who have tried to adopt curiosity-driven pedagogies such as PBL have struggled, and some have concluded that students do not always want to learn so actively, and they sometimes prefer to sit back and be led. These findings are open to different interpretations. They have sometimes been taken as evidence of limited enthusiasm for curiosity *per se*, or for particular ways in which curiosity is conceived and imposed upon them by managers, teachers and health workers, for example.

While the previous discussions of spaces for curiosity presented generally positive pictures of how organisations have found ways to support curious people and practices, and how

individuals and groups find and make their own space for curiosity, this discussion of a more fundamental space – *terra incognita* – has complicated the story. On the one hand, the encounter with *terra incognita* presents a troubling picture of spaces for curiosity, more generally, which serve and engage some people better than others, and politicize the question of who can be curious. On the other, the journey into unknown territory expresses intellectual vitality, danger and radical possibility. Though, in many contemporary efforts to create space for curiosity, these rough edges have been smoothed over, as curiosity has been democratised (to an extent) and sanitised and managed (to the extent that this is possible), the explorer and the image of *terra incognita* present a starker and more ambivalent picture, which helps to explain why feelings about curiosity are more mixed and reserved than is readily apparent.

Mixed feelings towards curiosity are, in part, a function of diverse understandings of what curiosity is and can be, and different strategies through which curiosity is variously practiced, encouraged and imposed. Many of the projects described in this paper have been 'top down' schemes, and some of these have met resistance or incomprehension. Eden's Director of Mission, reflecting on the limited success of the Project's curiosity workshops, told me: 'It's absolutely true that we do want to be champions of curiosity, but in practice it's not easy'. He explained that while creative professionals 'have an innate understanding of why we may want to work in this way,' some others do not, and the latter include 'operatives [doing] menial jobs where curiosity is in no practical sense needed, recognised or rewarded' (communication from Tony Kendle, 20/5/2011). A study tracking the five ways to wellbeing came to similar conclusions. It attributes the limited success of the 'take notice'

agenda to constraints of time and money, access and availability, but also alludes to issues such 'incapacity' and 'willpower' (NEF, 2008: 25). The report suggests that 'in some cases people appear to be circumscribed by group or cultural norms' including a preference – among some – to 'get drunk' (NEF, 2008: 30).

**Conclusion: a Place for Curiosity**

Writing not simply about but for curiosity, I have argued that we should recognise and value, set aside and defend, and where necessary design and build spaces for curiosity. I began by acknowledging expressions of enthusiasm for and commitments to curiosity and then went on to translate these to a geographical register, exploring how it can be possible to find, make and animate spaces for curiosity. These include virtual spaces (including the internet, most obviously, but also other forms too), which overlap with a series of material counterparts (such as streets, libraries, museums, classrooms and workplaces). These spaces can open up or close down possibilities for curiosity, and so can the ways in which they are used: structured, managed, governed and inhabited. In each case, geographies of and for curiosity are characterised by a mixture of the practices they accommodate and structure (for example problem solving, learning and creative work, and research) and the outcomes, significance or purposes of these practices (for health and wellbeing, social relationships, citizenship and social responsibility, and so on).

Geographical perspectives on curiosity flesh out the many different meanings of a term that tends to be simplified and homogenised in general definitions. There is nothing wrong with the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* definition of curiosity, quoted at the beginning of this paper, or with Michel Foucault's more passionate articulation of 'the desire to know more, and to know it more deeply and to know other things' (Foucault, 1988: 327). But, while these quotations provide useful points of departure, they also reduce curiosity to a common denominator, so generic it is almost empty. To understand what curiosity means *and can mean* today, it has helped to turn from general claims and definitions towards the contexts and spaces in which ideas about curiosity are expressed and mobilised. In other words, by thinking geographically about this subject, we ultimately begin to historicise it: to recognise the different forms curiosity takes and the ways in which these are constructed and embedded within discourses: systems of power and knowledge. Building upon histories and genealogies of earlier and other forms of curiosity (Benedict, 2001), this paper has shown why it will be fruitful to historicise contemporary curiosities, and has suggested some of the ways in which this might be done, laying some of the foundations for such a project.

I have argued not simply for more, but for better – more discriminating and critical – curiosity. This needs to begin with a more systematic critique of existing efforts to encourage curiosity. My comments about the elitist and cautious character of contemporary cultures of curiosity have been somewhat speculative and introductory; this calls for a more detailed examination, which may reopen questions about who can be curious and how, and what their curiosity can be for. It may, to return to an example introduced above, be necessary to revisit the question of whether practices such as 'getting drunk' may be seen

as an expression of curiosity rather than an escape from it, as the UK Government-funded wellbeing researchers assumed (NEF, 2008: 30). In this context, alcohol and narcotics may express a profound desire for knowledge and experience, and one that cuts deeper than top-down schemes to encourage superficially curious practices often do (Reid, 2009). I have also alluded to other forms of curiosity that have been neglected and marginalised, such as the curiosity of people with mobility and visual impairments. Doing so, I have raised but not yet developed the prospects of affirming and exploring curiosities that embrace the full range of sensory possibilities, including non-visual and more-than-visual experiences, and engage with different forms of embodiment. It will also be rewarding to shift some attention from professionalised forms of curiosity, associated with the creative industries and elite arts and sciences, towards more practical and everyday forms of curiosity, which may be driven by necessity as much as inspiration. This suggests the need for a wider and more imaginative understanding of curiosity and its geographies.

Michel Foucault (1988: 328) once 'dream[ed] of a new age of curiosity.' Complementing and developing this epochal vision, and translating it into geographical terms, I dream – and in this paper I have sketched out some parameters of – a new and a renewed *place* for curiosity. Unlike the encounter with *terra incognita*, through which curiosity has frequently been imagined, the place of curiosity will be democratic and inclusive. But, like that encounter, it will be risky, dangerous and full of subversive and creative possibility.

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