

REFLECTIONS III: IMPACTS

WHY THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF GEOGRAPHY MATTER

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In this short talk, I quit for a moment the sources, archives and rigorous scholarship to which we HPGRG members are accustomed, for launching a militant plea. My plea is at the same time an endorsement for historical and theoretical approaches to geography and a liberating challenge to the panoply of counter-arguments that historical and cultural geographers, historians of geography and critical scholars in general face daily in most geography departments around the world. Explicitly or implicitly, we are constantly told that we are irrelevant, that we only do chatter while the real income comes from others doing 'concrete' things such as GIS, mapping, planning and environmental businesses, that nobody understands what we say and that, at best, what we do is 'nice', 'interesting', but finally a luxury that the neoliberal university cannot afford. In my plea, I say stop all that: it is time that we restart to say boldly that, if all our overt or implicit detractors are where they are, it is because once someone fought to render geography a scholarly discipline with its epistemological statutes and its prestigious genealogies. I argue that the relevance of geography, today, is not to please marketing logics by offering mediocre notions of 'employability' for paying customers in our classes: the relevance of geography is in its capacity to foster consciousness of social issues and to help individuals in acquiring their own critical tools to transform society and to gain more justice, equality and inclusion. For this, theory and history of geography are indispensable, because radical and critical approaches would not make sense

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without theoretical and historical consciousness, and geography would become an uncritical learning of technical skills. My final argument is that only through this consciousness we can make sense of 'what geography ought to be', to quote old Peter Kropotkin.

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