

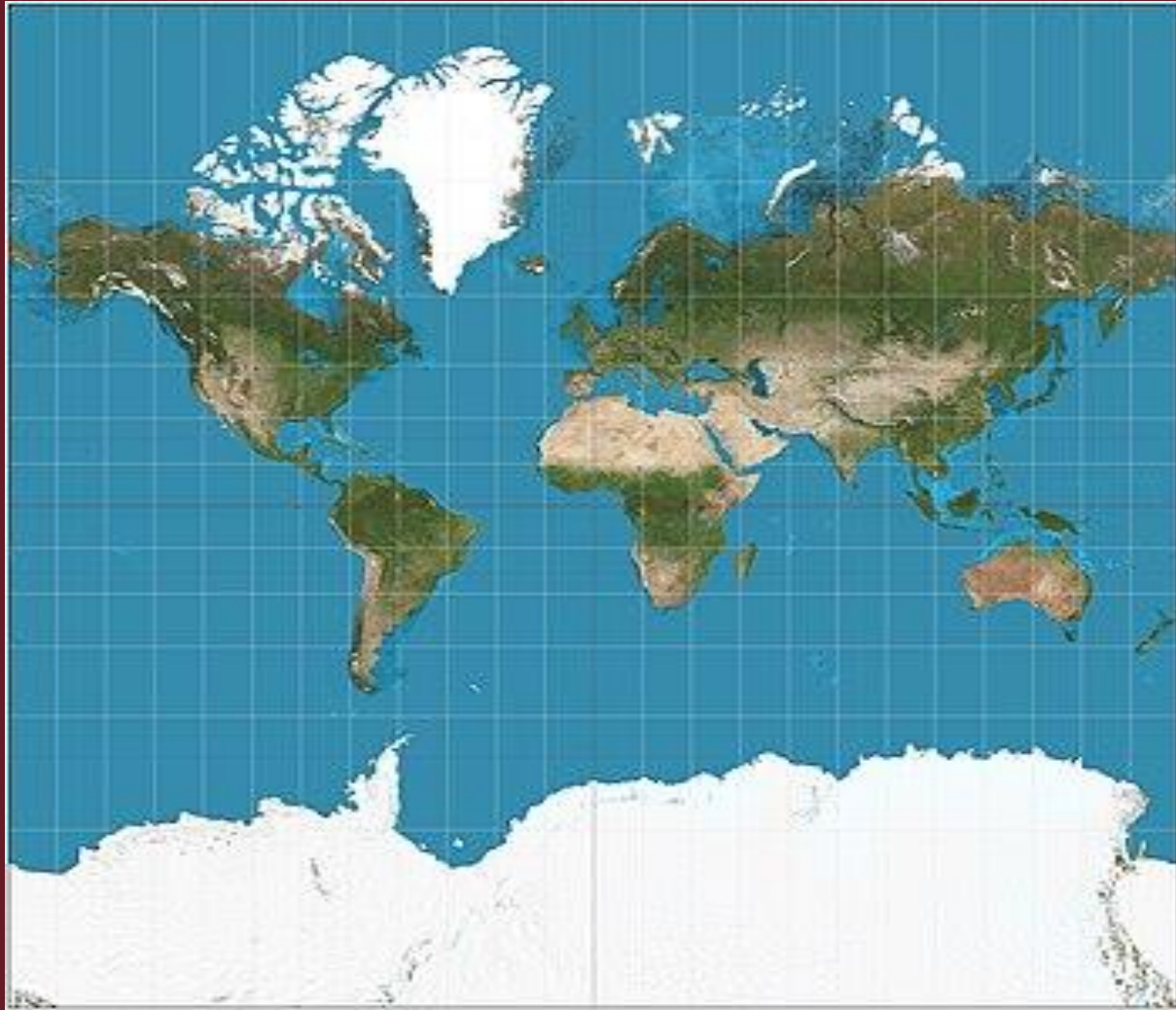


Eurocentrism and the myth of the 'West'

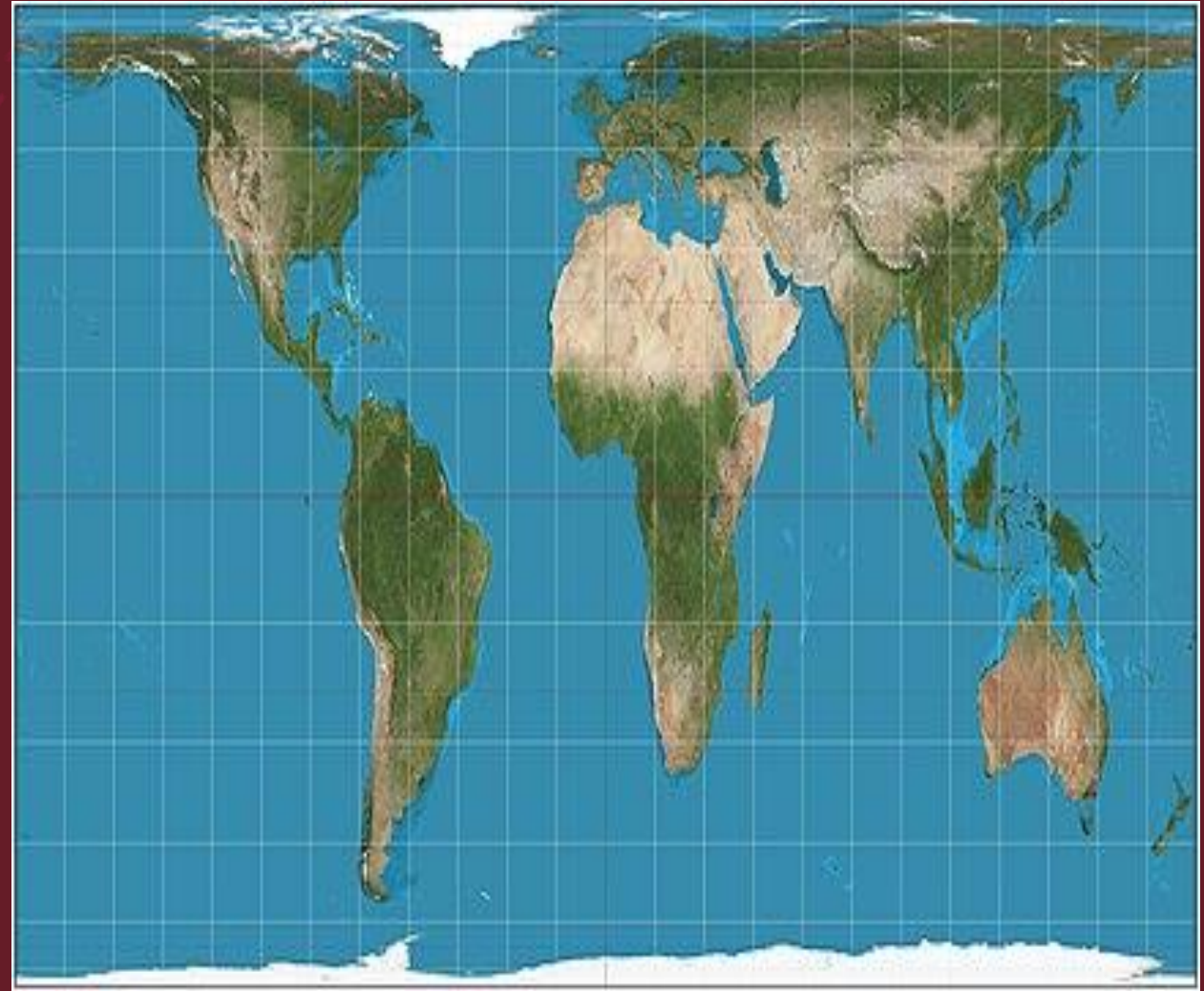
Research Methodologies in European Cultures and Societies

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18.11.2024



Mercator's Projection, 1569



Gall-Peters Projection, 1986

POWER & DISCOURSE

- DISCOURSES, according to M. Foucault's thesis, are coherent configurations of forms of representations (and microdiscourses, all intertwined), conventions, and habits of language use that produce specific fields of meaning, located in historical and cultural contexts, and to which individuals feel some sort of connection.
- A discourse accomplishes its goal when its meanings are naturalized (essentialized), **when it becomes the reality it designates**, hence erasing the marks of power and history.
- Discourses assist certain institutions in establishing the so-called 'regimes of truth': they put forth a view of history that pervades official pedagogy, school books, elite discourses, and the media at large.
- Power remains mostly INVISIBLE – the "hidden curriculum"
- Foucault's perspective – power – hegemony – consensus

DISCOURSE

- Discourse may also contain contradictions.
- Cf. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978):
- E.g.: The Orient was fashioned simultaneously as the image of spirituality and exoticism (it embodied desire, which the romantics felt was waning in the wake of the Industrial Revolution), while on the other side, the Orient was a region in need of European/Western power, because of its degeneration and weakness. In other words, what was valued at first , also had a negative underside.

Language and power

- The constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that **language is entwined in social power** in a number of ways: language indexes and expresses power, and is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power.
- Language provides a finely articulated vehicle for differences in power in hierarchical social structures.
- Power does not necessarily derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and the long term.

COUNTERDISCOURSE

- Resistance - associated to emancipation
- Revisionist perspectives
- Writing from inside language ('estrangement' as tactic)
- 'Counterpunctual reading' (Said) to reveal the inconsistencies in hegemonic discourse
- POSTCOLONIAL forms of knowledge
- DECOLONIAL forms of knowledge

Shoat and Stam, "What is Eurocentrism?"


- Eurocentrism works as a DISCOURSE (/master-narrative): it forges its own coherence, disavowing or silencing conflicts and contradictions.

It departs from a perspective – **a single privileged point** – that places Europe at **the center of the world**, the original place from which all positive values, forms of knowledge, beliefs, etc. were generated.

The role of eurocentrism in the justification of colonialism – but its residue *remains* in the present

Shoat & Stam

- A broader discourse of WESTERN EXCEPTIONALISM (137)
- The idea of the WEST = Europe, North America share an origin and a tradition: the legacy of Greek and Roman Antiquity, Christianity, the Enlightenment, the drive to democracy and equality, rationality, capitalism, & whiteness = a linear cultural heritage that figures as "the Western Civilization".
- It circulates as a DISCOURSE that goes on naturalizing the hierarchies legated by the colonial/imperial order and asigning the West with a Providential mission, in the sense of a destiny. This derives meanings of UNIVERSALITY and SUPERIORITY. (138)
 - → this idealization results in a mythification of that entity, the West

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- In order to afford this centrality, Eurocentrism had to construct its Others. So, it is a relational category, and as a consequence, too, it always generates power relations.
 - Usually, the distinction is based on conceptual opposites: order/chaos; activity/passivity; culture/nature; etc.

E.g.:

- Said demonstrated how 'Orientalism' was devised in order to construct the identity' of the West itself

II. How can Eurocentrism be deconstructed? Santos, "A Non-Occidentalist West?"

- Insp. by Jack Goody, *The Theft of History* (2006)
- A global history - new epistemological models: DIVERSITY over dichotomies
- Would have to rely on multiple times and spaces, and assume its **partiality** (104)
- A more humble West must be **intercultural** (105): 3 proposals inspired by philosophers from the margins of Europe:
 - Lucian de Samosata, against the waste of experience – a witness to a multicultural classical antiquity
 - Nicholas of Cusa's learned ignorance
 - Blaise Pascal's wager

Santos, "A Non-Occidental West?"

- What are the resources at hand?
- 1. put to test established epistemologies or theories - look for questions that were left unanswered; a tactic against 'orthopedic thinking' that produces non-emancipatory knowledge (a false happiness);
- 2. propose rejection even not holding an alternative (learned ignorance) not knowing relates to the alternatives-to-be; it humbly assumes the infinity of possibilities, incl. of different ways of knowing (114-115);
- 3. assemble an ecology of knowledge - search for knowledge is permanent; knowledge as a plurality of ways of knowing avoids asymmetry of powers (116); plurality can work by solidarity or association, so that knowledge practices are always under reinvention ('artisanship of practices', 119);
- 4. the wager, as an intermediary tool between faith and rationality, ascertains that social transformation is a possibility against all risks and negative reasons (120); implies looking for the subversive and creative aspects normally absent from the everyday life and deem utopia impossible (121);
- Santos acknowledges all these proposals as western in origin but anti-occidental bcs aware of their limits and therefore more open in scope (122).

II. How can Eurocentrism be deconstructed?

- Assume the ignorance of Eurocentrism regarding non-western traditions or forms of knowledge;
- signal issues of appropriation;
- deconstruct metaphors and tropes;
- look for the consequences of linear stories;
- search for what is silenced;
- signal discontinuities, ruptures, conflicts;
- seek for larger connections (e.g. the long novel, p.150), that bring along non-eurocentric forms of agency

Group activity

- Check how many NOBEL PRIZES in literature were awarded to non-Western writers
- Check how many UNESCO World Heritage sites are outside the West
- Check how many non-Western films won the OSCAR for the Best International Feature Film category

Nominations for Best International Feature Film Oscar category 2024

- Jonathan Glazer, *The Zone of Interest* (UK)
- Matteo Garrone, *Io Capitano* (Italy)
- Wim Wenders, *Perfect Days* (Japan)
- J.A. Bayona, *The Society of the Snow* (Spain)
- Ilker Catak, *The Teacher's Lounge* (Germany)

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