How we think of the world determines how we act in and on the world. Academia helps shape that thinking. Geography especially can encourage a particular imagination that sees the world as one. The apparatus of academic writing can, however, sometimes hide the need for action – bibliographies, citations and academic rigour can make it harder to see why the research matters.

The painting of pictures fuels the geographical imagination and visual images provide better fuel than do metaphorical ones. Cartographers know this; most geographers are still learning. This chapter is a cartographic plea for action, without the distractions. The chapters in this book present us with evidence and with moral imperatives. But research and books like this should not exist in a policy vacuum. You can think and act. Change can be powered by rhetoric and the mapped form of the world can evoke a persuasive call.

Be moved by these striking global images!
Rolled out on a map the entire surface of the globe is clear – a view even the few human beings who have walked on the moon could not see. The image is often centred on Europe and stretches out the high latitudes but that is not how it most distorts your mind. The map can make you think that it is land that matters – rather than people. Draw a map of people and you begin to think a little more imaginatively. Draw a map of people you hope will be alive in three centuries’ time and you begin to think even more carefully.

Draw a map, not of people but of what people have, and you perhaps begin to think a little more openly. Where are all the cars on the planet? To where is the petroleum flowing and from where are the exhaust fumes rising? How many cars are needed if all are to have what the rich have now in three centuries’ time?

What means of transport do most people use in the world? Where are two wheels not used because most folk can afford more or none? Again, where does the fuel come from?

Figure 64.2. Territory drawn in proportion to population estimated by the UN for the year 2300.

Figure 64.3. Territory drawn in proportion to numbers of passenger cars.
Where does the pollution go? How many lives are lost when the scooters come off the roads and the motorbikes don’t mix with cars? From and to where are all these people moving?

Like minds, some vehicles require more fuel than others. Some homes are better heated than others. In some places without petroleum there would be no plastic and without plastic there would be a great deal missing. So with what do those who need the petrol (and so much more) pay? What pays for the petrol to flow to where the cars run? For the steel to be taken to where the cars are made? For all that comes to those who have the most?

*What do the rich have to offer the poor for their resources?*

Everything that matters most, when counted in dollars, comes from the richest areas of the world. That is why they are rich. Increasingly, they own the most expensive products of all –
ideas – which they license for sale. Ideas that make songs, ideas that make cars, ideas that make medicines. And what do they want for their ideas? What could the poorer territories of the world have that could possibly be of value to the wealthy?

And for what do they sell their financial advice, their insurance and their ideas that make songs, cars and medicines? What could there be outside their territories that they need? From where do the songs, the cars and the medicines come, or even the wood to pulp for paper on which to write their ideas?

And from where have they taken what the rich think they need? Equally from everywhere? Or do they keep their forests, the copyrights to their songs, their iron for their steel for their cars and their ideas for their medicines to themselves?

Surely the map of what is taken from the world does not paint a picture of the richest territories squeezing out what they value from the lands of the poor?

Figure 64.6. Territory drawn in proportion to the value royalties and licence fees export earnings.

Figure 64.7. Territory drawn in proportion to the area of forests 1990.
Surely not?

But at least the rich can use their knowledge, their ideas, their wealth, to help those whose resources they plunder. Without wealth ‘creation’ we would never attain the progress needed to improve all our lives – to bring music round the planet, to cover the lands with cars, and to make medicines that everyone can use?

People would never be that selfish.
Would we?

Figure 64.8. Territory drawn in proportion to the area of forests ‘lost’ 1990–2000.

Figure 64.9. Territory drawn in proportion to the numbers of people dying from HIV-associated disease.