

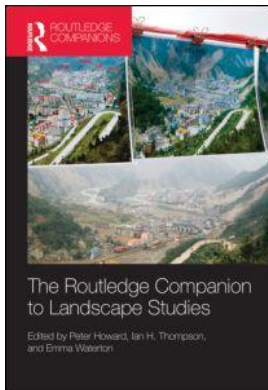
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Historic landscapes

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The study of the historic landscape has a diverse and rich heritage within a number of cognate disciplines across the social sciences and humanities. Attempts to define the historic landscape as an academic commodity have, mercifully, proved notoriously difficult, preserving its multi- and inter-disciplinary appeal. Historic landscape studies can, however, be broadly characterized as sharing a central concern with ‘how people in the past conceptualized, organized, and manipulated their environments and the ways that those places have shaped their occupants’ behaviors and identities’ (Branton 2009: 51). As such, the inter-relationships between place and human activity are clearly important, yet the landscape is not limited to being the passive, neutral, setting for human activity, nor should it be seen as merely another form of artefact, created by human activity, instead it encompasses material, cognitive and symbolic realizations of human–environmental relationships.

Any discussion of the subject is immersed within contested and negotiated definition of terms which are fundamental to the human condition, particularly ‘landscape’ and ‘place’. The geographer Allan Pred usefully defined place as always involving ‘an appropriation and transformation of space and nature that is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of society in time and space’ (Pred 1984, 279). So whilst many practitioners find it useful to define landscape studies as concerned with ‘place’ rather than ‘space’, to denote the primacy of human intervention and social value attached to meaning in the landscape (Preucel and Meskell 2004), on another level landscape studies resist association with a single place or site. The issue of scale is important, as ‘landscape’ is so often used in distinction to site-based enquiry, particularly within the context of archaeology. So in addition to providing a framework through which to interpret human behaviour within physical and social spaces, landscape studies also highlight that behaviour across a series of localities which might include townships, parishes, regions or colonies. Yet within these broad landscapes, connected and defined by the relationships evident within them, a series of ‘nested landscapes’ may be discerned representing how different social groups such as family, kin, community or gender ascribed very different meaning and significance to the physical spaces within which they lived and worked (Knapp and Ashmore 1999).

Understanding the significance of the historic landscape has moved to the centre of planning policy in the UK since the ratification of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2004 (Dejeant-Pons 2006). The convention recognized in law the value within everyday

landscapes – those fashioned by the traditional ways of life followed by the majority of the population – as ‘an essential component of people’s surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity’ – prompting a new regard for the historic landscape within European definitions of public heritage (Jones 2007). In the UK, the development of historic landscape characterization (HLC) as a planning tool, provided the vehicle for implementing the ELC. The adoption of the ELC and implementation of HLC broadly coincided with a series of publications and events to mark the fiftieth anniversary of W. G Hoskins’s (1955) *The Making of the English Landscape* – the publication which many regard as marking the start of landscape studies. Hoskins’s undoubted legacy was to establish a popular interdisciplinary subject within the UK, beyond the traditional constraints of academia. However, his work has been criticized recently for its implicit value system, which is imbued with nostalgia for an idealized rural landscape – values bequeathed by the Romantic movement of Wordsworth and Ruskin, who campaigned for the preservation of rural landscapes which they saw as threatened by industrialization and modernity (Bender 1998; Johnson 2007). Hoskins was certainly forthright about the threats to the historic landscape from contemporary developments he saw around him, in particular, the continuing militarization of the landscape and the unbridled interests of government bureaucracy and planners in the post-war period. Significantly, echoes of Hoskins can be discerned within the European Landscape Convention, with its commitment that the signatories should strive to sustain traditional ways of life that in turn support diverse forms of landscape character. The wider impact of HLC in the academic sphere is discussed elsewhere in this volume, (see Herring) so it will suffice to mention here that within the UK the adoption of HLC has been a contested process, as has the implementation of the ELC and other forms of landscape designation across Europe (Austin 2007; Finch 2007; Herring 2009; Krauss 2005; Williamson 2007).

Despite these initiatives and broad public interest in landscape heritage, there have been few signs of the anticipated revival in historic landscape studies. Most of the contributions to a three-volume set marking the half century since *The Making of the English Landscape* noticeably conformed to what is often characterized as a positivist form of ‘reading the landscape’, based around small-scale, empirical, intensive local studies, devoted to recording and identifying a set of associated landscape features, such as a deer park or monastic grange complex (Aston 1985; Bowden 1999; Muir 2000). Whilst undeniably valuable in recognizing the archaeological assets within the landscape, few of these studies engage with broader research questions about social or cultural change, preferring instead to determine a chronology (sometimes a relative chronology) which might then be linked to a general historical narrative about, for example, the relationship between Roman and post-Roman settlement sites, or the extent of monastic agricultural expansion.

The reaction to this approach was developed by archaeologists seeking to challenge the totalizing processual frameworks, based on systems theories, which were popular in the social sciences during the early 1980s. By the mid-1990s the new wave of post-processualism extended into landscape studies, shifting attention towards more subjective approaches that eschewed overtly scientific methodologies in favour of the experiential, prompted by prehistoric landscape studies, that emphasized how individuals engaged with the landscape and how the environment was an active constituent in their social and cultural lives (Ashmore 2004; Edmonds 1999; Ingold 2000; Tilley 1994). The crux of the debate between positivist and post-processual approaches centred on the relationship between people and landscapes, both in the past, and in the present, where narratives about the past are produced. For the post-processualists, there was a distinct lack of people within the landscapes described by earlier landscape studies, which focused on recovering and recording the material features within the

landscape, to the exclusion of how they affected the cultural landscape as experienced by the inhabitants.

Drawing on phenomenology and anthropological studies of relationships between cultures, communities and landscapes, post-processualists emphasized that individuals exist within a reciprocal relationship with our surroundings, rather than being abstracted and separated from it in a Cartesian sense. Ingold has argued that landscape studies need to recognize the 'dwelling perspective': emphasizing that people were reciprocally engaged with the landscape within which they lived (Ingold 2000: 194–5). These post-processual approaches reflect, in one sense, an attempt to reimagine prehistoric mindsets within which individual identities might become blurred, as did concepts of myth, belief and natural resources. Such approaches have less obvious advantages within the historic environment, where definitions, identities and relationships appear, superficially at least, to be similar to those of the modern world. However, historical studies, of even the recent past, reveal how much those relationships have changed over relatively short periods of time, as working patterns changed dramatically in the first half of the twentieth century. The secondary aim of post-processual studies is arguably more relevant to historic landscape studies – that of seeking to connect subjective, fleeting lives with longer term processes of change that create the material and cultural conditions visible within the landscape (e.g. Barrett 1994: 1–3). The seasonal rhythms and temporality of practical activities are perceived to 'congeal' within the landscape, creating patterns and forms that in turn inform the continuation of those activities (Ingold 2000: 179). The general tendency, therefore, has been to shift the focus away from traditional, abstract, external, views of the landscape, to a more embedded, experiential, perspective. This approach appears to offer enormous potential for historic landscape studies, with its extensive range of material, documentary and oral history sources, yet few have taken it up with vigour. Whilst historians have shown the lead with 'microhistories' that place detailed narratives about communities within the nineteenth-century landscape, for example, researchers have been slow to provide fine-grained, populated, landscape studies of the same quality (Reay 1996, 2004). This is despite frequent calls to represent the historic landscape not just as an objective backdrop for social and cultural histories, but as an inhabited space full of contested and negotiated relationships that are not pale reflections of historical narratives, but are actually part-and-parcel of those cultural changes.

One of the obstacles to the wider adoption of the post-processual approaches has been that they are often linked to the use of alternative forms of dissemination, such as creative writing, which have hitherto been alien to a discipline so indebted to historiographical, rather than the anthropological, practice. Post-processual narratives have drawn on a wide range of sources and inspirations, from ethnography to poetry and oral history, in order to integrate direct experience and emotional engagement with tasks and places apparent within the landscape. However, these innovations have attracted sharp criticism, notably from Andrew Fleming (2006), who linked the 'hyper-interpretive' style with the belief amongst post-processualists that practitioners 'have to go beyond the evidence' (original emphasis, Bender 1998: 7) particularly when reimagining the prehistoric past. Historical archaeologists in the UK have expressed a concern that they have too much data to assimilate, and so the prospect of 'going beyond the data' is rarely tested or pursued (Austin 1990). Blake has also argued that in seeking to reimagine encounters with landscape, phenomenological approaches can have a tendency to 'universalize human experience, and reduce it to a pre-cultural process onto which contingently derived meanings are pasted' (Blake 2004: 236). Historic landscape studies also suffer, arguably, from the apparent familiarity of its material. The features of the modern landscape are recognized, classified and so understood. Such an approach operates well, distinguishing or 'reading' events within the 'palimpsest' of landscape, but tends to reinforce the dualism between physical and cultural

landscapes, emphasizing the former over the latter. The historic landscape is assumed to lack the ‘otherness’ that demands critical and theoretical engagement. As a result, it is rarely imbued with an active role in social processes. This has, in turn, tended to perpetuate the notion that an economic rationale is the determinant of change and the most significant engine of landscape change.

One notable example of this is the way in which parliamentary enclosure, which transformed the landscape of many English regions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, has been dealt with by landscape studies in terms of the regularization of field boundaries, the modernization of farming methods, and increased yields and rents per acre, rather than as part of the cultural project for ‘improvement’, which resulted in radical changes to social relationships and local geographies (Mingay 1997; Tarlow 2007; Turner 1980). One of the most notable exceptions to this generalization about how historic landscape studies have tended to ignore cultural values, has been the study of garden landscapes. Ornamental landscapes in both Europe and North America have been extensively studied and interpreted in the light of changing social relationships, power and aesthetics (Bermingham 1987; Leone 1984; Mukerji 1997; Williamson 1995). Yet perhaps significantly, these were uninhabited landscapes; their significance is declared through the single discourse of aesthetics rather than through the accumulation of social practice. It might be argued, therefore, that ornamental landscapes have proved particularly amenable to cultural interpretation because they appear to have a dominant message about property ownership and control, and can, consequently, be studied in isolation from the productive landscape and the poly-vocal, mundane patterns of everyday life.

In response to post-processualism, one of the most commonly adopted approaches to the historic landscape has been the biographical narrative. This has been particularly true in the USA, where archaeology has strong disciplinary links with anthropology, rather than history (e.g. Praetzelis 1998). James Deetz has argued that since archaeologists should consider themselves to be ‘storytellers’ they should engage with their responsibility to communicate and adopt more accessible styles of presentation (Deetz 1998). Mary Beaudry (1998), for example, drew women into the account of a farm excavated at Newbury, Massachusetts, by the ‘discovery’ of journal fragments relating to the ‘voices’ of four individuals who were known to have lived there in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Beaudry deliberately blurs the boundaries between documentary record and fictional creation until a bibliographic essay at the end of her piece reveals her sources, techniques and rationale. In the UK the creation of fictional vignettes and narratives has been used by social historians as parallel texts to the more traditional historiography (Lee 2006), whilst landscape archaeologists have also used vignettes, usually constructed from oral testimony in court records from individuals whose voice is rarely heard in the historical record, since they serve to capture the broader historical currents within a snapshot of ordinary lives (Whyte 2007).

Others have sought to weave together historical biography with influential landscapes. In his chapter ‘Three around Farnham’, Raymond Williams (1985) contrasted perspectives on rural landscapes of the politician and writer William Cobbett, the naturalist Gilbert White and the novelist Jane Austen, all of whom lived within a few miles of each other on the border of Surrey and Hampshire at the end of the eighteenth century, but who never actually met. Williams used their writings to demonstrate the rapid changes in society, landscape and perception, and to lead the reader into a ‘new kind of consciousness’ about the period and the subject matter. Whereas Williams had to use his imagination to unite the three writers around a landscape, a similar piece located within the landscape of Harewood House in Yorkshire, uses historical sources to reconstruct the actual meeting of Humphry Repton, the landscape



Figure 12.1 Harewood House from the south-east by John Varley c.1805. The view shows the extensive 'naturalized' landscape envisaged by 'Capability' Brown around the house built with profits from the Lascelles involvement in the Atlantic slave trade and Caribbean (reproduced by kind permission of the Earl and Countess of Harewood and the Trustees of Harewood House Trust).

gardener, William Wilberforce the abolitionist, and Henry Lascelles from the family who owned Harewood along with a considerable number of sugar plantations in the Caribbean (Finch 2008) (see Figure 12.1). In both essays the landscape is the common ground between the protagonists which brings out significant differences and similarities in perceptions, some of which are themselves rooted in the experience of other, often very different, landscapes. One of the best examples of using biographical narratives within a landscape context is Stephen Daniels's (1999) biography of Humphry Repton, which is structured around key relationships between Repton and landscapes at different stages of his life.

Within all of these studies the biographical narrative, either of individuals or of a landscape, plays an important role. Archaeological studies tend to adopt the idea of 'artefact biography' as developed from anthropological studies (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) and focus on a small-scale landscape over the *longue durée*, or in some cases the narrative relates to an element within the landscape, such as a building or workshop (Tatlioglu 2010). Others have turned instead to a concept of landscape biography developed by the cultural geographer Samuels (1979), who was one of the first to argue landscapes must be conceptualized as active in their 'authorship' of relationships with people and communities. Samuels suggested that ideologies and cultural representations of space and place, or 'landscapes of impression', were themselves the context for the creation of landscapes, or 'landscapes of expression' (Samuels 1979: 72).

These tenets of landscape biography have been used to effect in the study of landscapes in the southern Netherlands, where a large scale project has sought to integrate a historical research agenda within a development-led project, resulting in a study that preserves a strong sense of the multilayered nature of landscapes, including the reordering, reuse and representation of the past, without succumbing to a linear sense of development (Roymans et al. 2009). The project aimed to view the landscape at various points in time as the ‘interim outcome of a longstanding and complex interplay between the history of mentalities and values, institutional and governmental changes, social and economic developments and ecological dynamics’ (Roymans et al. 2009: 339), developing the axiom articulated by Meinig: ‘one aspect which is so pervasive as to be easily overlooked: the powerful fact that life must be lived amidst that which was made before’ (Samuels 1979: 44). Landscapes are active in binding people and generations together, whilst creating their own life histories at different time scales through successive social contexts.

Interest in the dynamic and sometimes transient relationships between individuals, communities and resources within the historic landscape have led to the increasing use of actor–network theory (ANT) as a way of modelling how fluid relationships between people, artefacts and ideas can affect the patterns or systems of inhabitation. Introduced to the social sciences by Bruno Latour and by the sociologist John Law, the emphasis upon non-human agency provided potential for the materiality of landscape (Latour 2005; Law and Hassard 1999). One of the most convincing studies to use ANT as a methodology for understanding the relationships within landscapes, and in particular the impact and importance of non-human agency has been Jones and Cloke’s *Tree Cultures* (2002). Jones and Cloke (2002: 1) centre their study on the agency of trees in an attempt to provide a closely theorized study of the interconnections in nature–society relations and place relations. In addition to considering the cultural significance of trees in a manner similar to Daniels’s important earlier paper on the political iconography of woodland in Georgian England (Daniels 1988), Jones and Cloke use ANT to develop further the role of trees in both the creation of places of cultural significance, but also their role in the mundane, everyday practices that through the creation of networks, generate diverse relationships within and across landscapes. If post-processualism is to avoid the criticisms levelled at its more extreme manifestations, then the methodology provided by ANT has the capability to include multiple material-semiotic relationships through which multi-vocality can be realized within landscape studies.

One of the most important areas within which historic landscape studies can make a significant contribution is in understanding the global impact and legacy of colonialism. The extension of competing national interests across the globe is one of the defining features of modernity and remains the root for many contemporary issues of inequality. Initially, many studies of plantations in North America and the Caribbean described how the spatial organization of the landscape reproduced dominant power relationships and mirrored the inequalities inherent in the slave system by prioritizing social control and surveillance (e.g. Delle 1999). Plantation studies have also attempted to identify landscapes of resistance within the plantations, to provide a narrative for those oppressed by the system (Delle 1998, 2000; Orser and Funari 2001). Studies which sought to understand the landscapes familiar to the enslaved populations, however, were forced to forego traditional methodologies and rely instead on oral testimony and tradition to recover the uses and perceptions of landscapes of the enslaved (Pulsipher 1994).

It is notable that critical or interpretive studies of the historic landscape are arguably most affective in designed landscapes. Early interest in ornamental landscapes in both the UK and North America identified the manipulation of landscape with the expression of dominant ideologies. Tom Williamson argued convincingly that the landscapes laid out around late eighteenth-century country houses articulated the owners’ membership of ‘polite society’ – the emerging

cultural milieu that sought to integrate traditional landed wealth with that derived from mercantile capitalism (including the Atlantic economy) – whilst serving to exclude members of the bourgeoisie through the sheer scale of necessary landownership (Williamson 1995). Birmingham argued that the shelter belts that were planted to screen many such landscapes were tools of spatial and visual exclusion, intended to isolate the ornamental landscape from the landscape of toil and labour beyond, as well as isolating the class of owners from wider society (Birmingham, 1986). Interpretation of the William Paca garden in Annapolis has drawn heavily on structural notions of geometry reflecting ‘natural’ hierarchies in nature as legitimization for asymmetrical social relationships (Leone 1984; 2005). However, both ornamental gardens and plantation landscapes represent examples of landscapes being manipulated to sustain or support particularly well-defined social relationships: on the one hand the privileged position of the larger landowner and on the other the extremes of enslaved labour. The same observation can be made about many other successful historic landscape studies – Casella’s excellent work on Tasmanian women’s workhouses (Casella 2001) and De Cunzo’s (2001) study of institutional landscapes around asylums in Pennsylvania, for example.

Attempts to recover the significance of everyday landscapes are much harder to come by. Accepting that the bulk of the population did not have the power to remake landscapes on a grand scale and yet were not without agency, has tended to focus attention back on the individual (even the individual body) and onto smaller spaces, such as the domestic interior, where routine, repetitive, activities might become ‘sedimented’ (De Cunzo and Ernstein 2006, 268). But such studies open up debate about definitions of landscape and of the universal merit of the individual, even within the relatively recent historic period.

There has also been a tendency to consider landscape developments in British colonies as simply reflecting cultural developments in the metropole. However, recent studies have called for post-colonial studies to de-centre the metropole and consider reciprocity in the relationships (Hicks 2007). Historic landscape studies have also experienced an ‘ecological turn’ within the context of post-colonial studies, and a number of important studies have sought to articulate the impact of colonialism on the environmental resources (Driver and Martins 2005; Grove 1995). The significance of historic landscape studies within colonial contexts is clearly one that can be developed further and offers considerable potential given the networks that extend across Europe and the Atlantic World.

There is still a sense that the traditional interpretations of the historic landscape do not adequately address how they were used, perceived, or how they related to wider social and cultural change. The success of biographical narratives in other areas suggests that they might be one way in which to effectively repopulate and contextualize the historic landscape. The rich variety of data available from the period makes it difficult to be comprehensive, but it may also provide the means by which to avoid some of the criticisms that have been made about the presumptions implicit within creative narratives. The greatest potential would seem to be in using the empirical diversity and strengths of the historical period as a firm foundation from which to offer new understandings about how individuals and communities lived and worked within relationships that were bounded by and within landscapes of meaning: meaning which was itself diverse, fluid, negotiated, contested and transient, but which was inextricably linked to both the tangible, material, landscape and to the intangible perception of landscapes.

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