

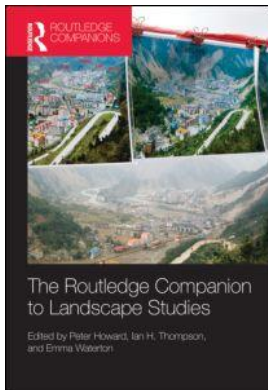
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New directions in the literary representation of landscape

Richard Kerridge

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What is happening to landscape in contemporary writing? I will outline two of the most important traditional genres of literary landscape, and then discuss some of the contemporary concerns that are reshaping these traditions.

Allegorical landscapes and their literary inheritors

Allegory is a method of giving dramatic representation to abstractions, generalizations and large political and social forces. Each character, thing, place or action in an allegory stands for something specific. The text is a code. This precision and limitation of reference is the difference between allegory and metaphor or symbol.

Landscape allegory uses generic landscape forms to represent virtues, vices, ideas, feelings or political and social entities. An example is the Christian tradition of representing a person's life as a journey, a pilgrimage, on which difficult moral and emotional terrain must be negotiated. Two instances of this are George Herbert's poem 'The Pilgrimage', from his sequence *The Temple* (1633), and John Bunyan's novel *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). The pilgrim must keep to the true path and struggle through difficulties, striving to keep the destination, salvation, in view. Delightful landscapes seen from the path are temptations to stray. Meadows and sweet flowers thus acquire sinister significance. Their deceptiveness replays the original temptation, and reveals the world to be fallen. In *Macbeth*, the porter speaks of 'the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire'.

'The Pilgrimage' is the narrative of a journey through such a landscape:

I travell'd on, seeing the hill, where lay
 My expectation.
 A long it was and weary way.
 The gloomy cave of Desperation
 I left on th'one, and on the other side
 The rock of Pride.

And so I came to Phansies meadow strow'd
 With many a flower:

Fair would I here have made abode,
 But I was quicken'd by my houre.
 So to Cares cops I came, and there got through
 With much ado.

That led me to the wilde of Passion, which
 Some call the wold;
 A wasted place, but sometimes rich.
 Here I was robb'd of all my gold,
 Save one good Angell, which a friend had ti'd
 Close to my side.

Pride's rock, Fancy's meadow, Care's copse and the wild wold of Passion represent spiritual hazards on the pilgrim's path. Similarly, Bunyan's protagonist, Christian, has to cross the Slough of Despond, climb the Hill of Difficulty, enter the Valley of Humiliation, and pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Commentators have identified these places with specific hills, valleys and a swamp near Bunyan's Bedfordshire home. For Puritans, such absolute threats and questions of salvation were indeed part of the meaning of ordinary surroundings. Landscapes, however familiar and tamed, were full of cosmic meaning.

The assigning of meaning to certain types of landscape in allegorical literature was therefore more than purely allegorical or metaphorical; the matching of landscape type to vice or virtue sometimes arose from traditions of direct belief that certain types of place were good or evil. Cheryl Glotfelty has explored such traditional attitudes to arid landscapes, connecting the attitudes with the industrial uses of these landscapes in recent history. She advocates a new landscape writing that explicitly rejects such traditions (Glotfelty 2001). Rod Giblett, using psycho-analytical theory in an account of the historical meanings of wetlands, proposes a celebratory identification of these landscapes with postmodern values (Giblett 1996).

With secularization, systematic allegory became unusual. A hybrid form, in which a dominant realism carried a trace of allegory, became common in literary representations of landscape. An example is the use of the river in George Eliot's novel, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Eliot was seeking secular forms of morality that would retain continuity with Christian traditions. Her fictional river, the Floss, flowing through the town where the story is set, is the basis of the town's economy, powering the mill. It is a realistically presented river, and it provides imagery with which the characters and the narrator frequently express their understanding. The novel conveys the community's material, cultural and imaginative relationship with its river. Rich and painful dilemmas about the idea of being 'carried away', for example, are explored by means of river imagery. In a feeling that grows to an almost irresistible current, Maggie is tempted by the possibility of elopement:

They glided rapidly along, (...) helped by the backward-flowing tide, past the Tofton trees and houses – on between the silent, sunny, fields and pastures which seemed filled with a natural joy that had no reproach for theirs. The breath of the young, unwearied day, the delicious rhythmic dip of the oars, the fragmentary song of a passing bird heard now and then as if it were only the overflowing of brim-full gladness, the sweet solitude of a twofold consciousness that was mingled into one by that grave untiring gaze which need not be averted – what else could be in their minds for the first hour?

They are carried along in silence, 'for what could words have been, but an inlet to thought?' Small developments of the river imagery register narrative insights and shifts in the characters' feelings – the brim-full gladness, the fluid mingling of consciousnesses, the inlet to thought. The

chapter is called 'Borne Along by the Tide'. Maggie yearns to 'glide along with the swift, silent stream and not struggle any more'. The novel ends with a catastrophic flood, an intrusion of the larger ecosystem into the self-preoccupied locality.

Several of Thomas Hardy's novels use landscape similarly. *The Woodlanders* (1887) is the story of a woodland village, a community of foresters; perhaps the closest thing to an indigenous community, traditionally and intimately involved with its local ecosystem, still to be found in England at the time of the novel's events. Trees are regarded from many viewpoints in the course of the novel. There is the modern industrial timber merchant's view, and the traditional forester's. We encounter the viewpoint of folklore descended from animist beliefs, and the viewpoint of the urban visitor with Romantic sensibilities, perhaps like the reader. The narrator who tells us the story makes reference to literature, painting, science and philosophy. These different views encounter each other continually.

Descriptions of woodland combine a Darwinian perspective with Schopenhauerian pessimism and Hardy's sense of tragedy:

They went noiselessly over mats of starry moss, rustled through interspersed tracts of leaves, skirted trunks with spreading roots whose mossed rinds made them like hands wearing green gloves; elbowed old elms and ashes with great forks, in which stood pools of water that overflowed on rainy days and ran down their stems in green cascades. On older trees than these huge lobes of fungi grew like lungs. Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention which makes life what it is was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling.

(Hardy 1887: 82)

The novel is pervaded by a sense of the vulnerability of trees, formidable with accumulated growth but stuck in one place – an image for the vulnerability of characters and of the indigenous pre-industrial community itself. Rootedness is a blessing and a curse.

The leading ecocritic Lawrence Buell observes that critics and theorists have not given 'setting' the attention bestowed on other basic components of literary representation:

As a schoolchild (...), I imbibed a commonly taught, watered-down version of Aristotelian poetic theory that defined "setting" as one of literature's four basic building blocks other than language itself – "plot", "character", and "theme" being the others. But the term was vaguely defined and required nothing more in practice than a few perfunctory sentences about the locale of the work in question.

(Buell 2005: 3–4)

In *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Buell sets out four conditions to be met by environmental literature:

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.

(Buell 1995: 7–8)

The prospect poem and its inheritors

In the 'prospect poem', a sub-genre of pastoral that was fashionable throughout the eighteenth century, the speaker is dramatically positioned on a hill or other vantage point, looking out upon a landscape. Sometimes these works are called 'reflective hill poems'. John Denham is credited with initiating the genre, with 'Cooper's Hill' (1642). John Dyer's 'Grongar Hill' (1726) is a good exemplar, while Thomas Gray's 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' (1742) may be the best-known prospect poem now, apart from Romantic developments of the genre, especially William Wordsworth's 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' (1798). Charles Darwin in the 'tangled bank' passage that ends *The Origin of Species* (1859) takes up a stance similar to the speaker's in a prospect poem, though his distance from what he sees is a matter of feet rather than miles, and his lordliness of survey comes from the smaller scale of the bustling world he contemplates. Philip Larkin picked up the genre in the mid-twentieth century, in his poems 'The Whitsun Weddings' (1958) and 'Here' (1961), in which the vantage-point overlooking the landscape is a train window.

In Gray's 'Ode', the prospect of space becomes also a terrifying prospect of time. Gazing down on the school prompts Gray to imagine – as allegorical figures – the likely fates waiting for the children playing there. Shocked, he falls back on the thought that it may be better not to attempt expansive vision: 'No more; where ignorance is bliss, / 'tis folly to be wise'. Wordsworth, in 'Tintern Abbey', gazes out at the river Wye, the wooded slopes above it and the mountain streams that feed the river. The sight brings thoughts of the animating effect of blood circulating in the body, and of sensations passing between body and mind. Memories, conscious and subliminal, are like streams arriving from distant, unseen sources to nourish him:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration (...).
O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the wood,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

The speaker stands at a distance from the landscape, but this Romantic vision of flowing process is a way of reinserting human selfhood in nature, since the memories come from the influence on mind and body of natural places, and produce the instincts that lead the speaker to seek out those places.

Ecocriticism and the representation of landscape

To some ecocritics, the separation of self and world enacted by the prospect poem – even if the poem then proceeds to question the security of the stance – is suggestive of the dualistic separation of humanity and nature, mind and body, in the Cartesian tradition. Many ecocritics associate this dualist tradition, and the view that it entails of nature as mechanism rather than organism, with the industrial rationality they see as responsible for ecological crisis. Such ecocritics are mistrustful of the removed viewpoint. David Abram is prominent among them; his influential book *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Abram 1996) calls for a reawakening of the sensuous awareness of the natural world that in modernity has fallen into disuse. These ecocritics seek embodied perspectives, positioned in the midst of the world rather than gazing down on it.

Heidegger is an important philosophical source for this approach. Merleau-Ponty, with his phenomenology of embodied perception, is another, particularly favoured by Abram.

The Heideggerian critique of metaphysics – especially the critique of ‘enframings’, the reductive advance-definitions of things that can pre-empt the real encounter with the otherness of those things – was one of the most important formative influences on Derrida’s critique of ‘the metaphysics of presence’, and on post-structuralist ideas in general. Ecocritics and cultural geographers informed by post-structuralist thinking will accordingly be suspicious of the view from outside. They seek instead a representation of subjectivity as process, always forming and reforming in what the ecocritical theorist Timothy Morton calls the ‘mesh’ of ecological relations (Morton 2010: 28).

‘Tintern Abbey’ contains a paradox. The poem expresses a joyful recognition of the continuous flow – of time, emotion, physical feeling, physical cause and effect – that embeds the individual subject in the infinite world. Yet the poem is able to make that recognition because the subject is not swept away by the flow. Subjectivity is not dissolved. It is the standing-back that makes possible the appreciation of flow. This version of the Romantic sublime is dramatized in many Romantic landscape poems, and has been accused of egotism, because of the sense of heroism that is sometimes generated around the notion of taking up an exposed position, in which the lone subject stands in heroic relief against the infinite prospect.

Morton and other ecocritics look for a literary representation of landscape that avoids the egotistical sublime but still recognizes the flow. From the ecocritical perspective, that flow is now the ecological interconnectedness that gives our actions consequences beyond the spatial and temporal horizons we can see. How is this beyond-horizon awareness to be combined with the sense of embeddedness? Ursula Heise, in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (Heise, 2008) suggests that ecocriticism’s preoccupation with the importance of knowing one’s local ecosystem has led to the neglect of something equally important – the perception and representation of global ecological relations.

In *Ecology without Nature*, Morton (2007) criticizes a device that is common in contemporary nature writing – the ‘as I write’ device, in which the narrator breaks off, as it were, to look at and listen to the surrounding environment and think of the mass of processes at work in the circumambient world beyond. For Morton, this is an example of ‘ambient poetics’ – a gesture subject to a basic paradox: ‘The more I try to show you what lies beyond this page, the more of a page I have’ (Morton 2007: 30). The gesture can also start with ‘as you read’; it is then the reader who is invited to pause and imaginatively look and listen outwards. Temporal as well as spatial distance is then drawn into the ambience, since the reading takes place sometime after the present invoked by the writing. Morton suggests that the device seems to be an act of opening but actually brings about closure, since for the ambience to be perceived there has to be a pause or breaking-off of the narrative, producing the sensation of a still point around which the ambience turns (Morton 2007: 29–35). What is beyond that circle is shut out.

How, then, is the combination of embeddedness and beyond-horizon awareness to be achieved? The late Val Plumwood, the ecofeminist philosopher, invented the term ‘shadow places’ for the places beyond the horizon of our vision that are damaged ecologically by our actions here. If we are to accept responsibility for our ecological connections to places we do not see, we must somehow incorporate the shadow places into our perception:

We must smell a bit of wrecked Ogoniland in the exhaust fumes from the air-conditioner, the ultimate remoteness, put-it-somewhere-else-machine. On [this] criterion, we would have to accept all these shadow places too as ‘our’ place, not just the privileged, special, recognized place, the castle-of-the-self-place called home.

(Plumwood 2008: 2)

Our conscious effort should be to attach new meaning to a sensation as physical as a smell. The theorist of environmental education Mitchell Thomashow develops similar ideas, suggesting that writing should have ‘the perceptual flexibility of moving between multiple perceptual worlds’ (Thomashow 2002: 103). An effort to acquaint ourselves more deeply with our immediate environment will involve ‘experimenting with the juxtaposition of scale’ (*ibid.*: 95) and cross-referencing between immediate observation and forms of research that open up different scales of perception, both spatial and temporal. One technique is to investigate, and attempt to imagine, the *umwelt* (Jacob von Uexkull’s term) of another creature – the world as revealed to that creature’s organs of perception:

As I work the soil I plunge my spade into countless pebbles and small boulders. To understand where they come from I must step out of my organismic *umwelt* and incorporate the conceptualization of a larger time frame.

(*ibid.*: 95)

An interesting way to expand *umwelt* is to *shift between the large and the small* [original italics]. Try following an ant as it moves across the forest floor, or as it zips across your kitchen. See if you can spend fifteen minutes or even longer observing any microhabitat – the lichens on a boulder or tree trunk, soil microorganisms, pond scum. When you are fully immersed in the microworld, shift your attention to the sky ... Observe a plane as it crosses the horizon. These shifts in perception allow you to expand or contract your gaze accordingly, permitting you to play with the boundaries of perception.

(*ibid.*: 95–6)

The social anthropologist Tim Ingold makes similar suggestions, as part of his project of bringing phenomenological ideas to bear upon anthropology. Ingold rejects what he sees as ‘a systematic bias in Western thought’: the tendency ‘to privilege form over process’ (Ingold 2000: 198). A painting, for example, will almost always be discussed as a final product rather than in terms of the work of painting. Ingold contrasts this with the practice of some non-Western cultures in which it is the activity of painting that constitutes the contemplative experience; the finished works are not given any lingering attention.

‘Taskscape’ is the new word he produces as an alternative to ‘landscape’: a word to remind us, when our surroundings seem to be laid out for our gaze, that our perception of them is not comprehensive, but is a function of the activity we are engaged in, work or leisure. Perception is conditioned by the specialization that a task involves – what the eye of the farmer or police officer picks out, as compared to the birdwatcher or historian – and by the duration of the task, its rhythms and the intervals for vision that it affords. ‘Tasks,’ Ingold says, in Heideggerian vein, ‘are the constitutive acts of dwelling.’ Each task is not isolated, but ‘takes its meaning from its position within an ensemble of tasks, performed in series or in parallel, and usually by many people working together’ (195). Ingold’s aims are not specifically environmentalist, yet he uses the term ‘ecological’ to characterize his approach.

‘Material feminists’ such as Stacy Alaimo, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Karen Barad also seek forms of representation that draw attention to the ‘mesh’ – to the way in which the material world consists of entities continually producing each other. Like discourse-theory in general, this approach has roots in Heidegger and the wider phenomenological tradition. ‘Material feminists’ call for an extension of discourse-theory from culture to the whole material world – a way beyond the exclusive cultural constructionism that has been characteristic of post-structuralist thought. The Foucauldian argument is that concepts are discourses, always in the process of being addressed by someone to someone else, and always already in the process of being

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generated by power relations and generating them in turn. But one result of discourse-theory is a tendency to polarize culture and nature, identifying the former with fluidity, play, constant exchange and the possibility of liberation, and the latter with intractable, fixed identity. Nature thus becomes an idea to be mistrusted – an ideology of oppression. In its emphasis on the role of language and culture in forming our beliefs about the world, discourse-theory tends to neglect material processes.

Barad introduces the term ‘agential realism’ as a way of acknowledging the agency of material things: the active role that they play in the making of meaning. This is a ‘posthumanist’ account of agency that extends it beyond human consciousness and action. Instead of the familiar term ‘inter-actions’, which implies the relatively separate engagement with each other of separate entities, she talks of ‘intra-actions’, a term that situates the action as always already inside a larger flow. The term constitutes a recognition that ‘relata do not pre-exist relations’ (Alaimo and Hekman 2008: 133). Human beings are ‘part of the world in its open-ended becoming’, the endless process of mutual shaping that constitutes all matter.

The world consisting of such matter is an ‘ongoing flow of agency’.

Literary strategies

If these ideas are to influence literary form, writers will need narrative and poetic strategies that continually reposition the implied reader, and ask the real reader what their position is in material relation to the place described. Disruptions of the narrative viewpoint seem likely, and disruptions of the customary pace of reading.

A good model is the remarkable narrative technique used by Thomas Hardy in his novels, when he moves the reader in and out of the viewpoints of different characters (sometimes their ‘taskscape’), plunging us into points of view and then pulling us back to more distant perspectives, often when we are most gripped by the character’s feelings. He also switches between the past tense of the story and a present tense in which he addresses generalized discussion to the reader, implying (as the maps at the beginnings of the novels imply) a shared space that the reader might enter, and thus a shared responsibility (see Kerridge 2001).

Another model is J. A. Baker’s extraordinary work of nature writing *The Peregrine* (2010 [1967]), the narrative of his observation of peregrine falcons in a small coastal area of Essex. Several stylistic features are of interest in connection with the ideas I have been discussing. It is hard to imagine a book more deeply lost in the inhabitation of one place, but from the beginning Baker embeds that place in a larger world by using bold comparisons:

Before it is too late, I have tried to recapture the extraordinary beauty of this bird and to convey the land he lived in, a land to me as profuse and glorious as Africa. It is a dying world, like Mars, but glowing still.

(Baker 1967: 21–2)

Similes continually expand the possibilities of the small patch of ground, revealing its capacity to evoke other worlds, and making physical and imaginative landscapes merge. Owls are described as ‘lemuring’ (ibid.: 155) – Baker frequently makes new verbs out of nouns. A peregrine is ‘lion-coloured’, and has under-feathers ‘thickly mottled with diamond-shaped spots, like the fur of a snow leopard’ (ibid.: 128). Two woodpeckers ‘looked like strange primeval butterflies clinging to a huge tree-fern in a steamy prehistoric jungle’ (ibid.: 153).

He plays with scale: ‘I swooped through leicestershires of swift green light’ (ibid.: 127) – the phrase compares his cycling to the peregrine’s flight. One purpose of these experiments is to strain towards recognition of the bird’s *umwelt*, as Thomashow would wish:

I came late to the love of birds. For years I saw them only as a tremor at the edge of vision. They know suffering and joy in simple states not possible for us. Their lives quicken and warm to a pulse our hearts can never reach. They race to oblivion. They are old before we have finished growing.

(*ibid.*: 18)

Sounds, especially birdsong, are conveyed with a rhetorical synaesthesia that simultaneously emphasizes their strangeness and places them on a continuum of sensation leading back to ourselves: the nightjar's song 'would smell of crushed grapes and almonds and dark wood. The sound spills out and none of it is lost. The whole wood brims with it' (*ibid.*: 18). 'Movement is like colour to a hawk; it flares upon the eye like crimson flame' (*ibid.*: 88). A flying peregrine 'lives in a pouring-away world of no attachment, a world of wakes and tilting, of sinking planes of land and water' (*ibid.*: 36).

The writing has been criticized for its exclusions. Nothing from Baker's family life or social life is mentioned. There is no interruption; just the pursuit of the birds. Kathleen Jamie protests at this – partly on feminist grounds – and writes a riposte to *The Peregrine*: an encounter with the same bird in crowded space, interrupted by domestic life. In *Findings*, (2005) Jamie explains that the discovery of peregrines nesting within sight of her home prompted her to read Baker for the first time and write about her own birds in response. For these peregrines, she chooses pointedly urban and unheroic comparisons:

The male peregrine was there today, sitting side-on, glumly inspecting his feet. He lifted first one yellow talon then the other, like one who has chewing gum on his shoe.

(*Jamie 2005*: 32)

The chewing gum startles with its incongruity, like a simile from 'Martian' poetry, yet seems authentic as an exact and spontaneous comparison. It also brings the peregrine into the same frame as ordinary urban experience. The nearest to it I can find in Baker is a line in the diaries:

I left the path back for a moment, and suddenly saw two Red Squirrels chasing about the trees, principally on an oldish oak. One was after the other's tail. Their tails, transparent as a frothy orange drink, streamed out behind.

(*Baker 2010*: 388)

That frothy orange drink may have been in Baker's lunchbox that day; suddenly we have a glimpse of shops. Though compatible with Baker's solitariness, the detail makes an interesting contrast to the elemental blood and gold elsewhere in Baker's writing. In deliberate contrast with Baker, Jamie integrates her watching of the peregrines with the bustle and interruption of family life:

'Swallows are back. Can you hear them?' I said.

'Mum, can we have our breakfast?'

'Just a minute ...'

Dammit. I'd glanced away for a moment, and when I looked back the peregrine had quit fidgeting and flown. But the door burst open again. 'Mum – can we have our breakfast? In the living room? So we can watch the cartoons on telly?'

'Yes,' I said. 'I'm coming.'

(*Jamie 2005*: 40)

The back-and-forth between the two zones and registers is intricate. Jamie wants her children to notice the wild birds, but ends up using a domestic idiom to characterize the peregrine: ‘quit fidgeting’ is probably something she says to her children.

The different kinds of mobility of viewpoint and idiom that Baker and Jamie display show what the new nature writing is beginning to do. A work that has not yet appeared but sounds promising in its combination of local and global is *Four Fields*, a book about four loved fields in Cambridgeshire, Zambia, Montana and Chernobyl, that the nature writer Tim Dee is currently completing.

Ursula Heise suggests that the techniques of collage or cut-up developed by twentieth-century High Modernists have potential for the representation of global ecological relations. Dispensing with the single narrator or speaker, these techniques allow disparate perspectives to be placed together, permitting jumps from personal experience to impersonal material, and jumps of spatial and temporal scale. Heise examines ways in which science fiction writers such as David Brin and John Brunner have adapted collage techniques from the documentary novels of John Dos Passos. She finds similar potential in forms of representation achieved by new technologies:

[T]he iconic representation of the “Blue Planet” seen from outer space has been superseded by the infinite possibilities of zooming into and out of local, regional and global views enabled by, for example, the online tool Google Earth and the multiple databases, geographical positioning systems, and imaging techniques on which it draws.

(Heise 2008: 10–11)

The poet Harriet Tarlo is another ecocritic who finds the use of cut-up and ‘found material’ in recent Modernist (or ‘linguistically innovative’) poetry especially apt for the representation of ecological crisis. These techniques emphasize language as a kind of commons, a public space in which the visible features are not privately or corporately owned; in this spirit, poets such as J.H. Prynne, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Peter Reading, Tony Lopez, Frances Presley and Tarlo herself practise a public ‘*détournement*’ – a wresting-back of language from official or corporate use, and a release of meanings that exceed and subvert the instrumentality of that use. The poet becomes ‘a re-user, a recycler of words’ (Tarlo 2009: 121). Tarlo argues that the awareness of a textual and cultural ‘ecology’ that these techniques produce leads directly to ecological awareness in the usual sense:

Lopez’s work insists that language is never wholly one’s own in poetic practice. In common with all the poets here, he draws attention to the textual, material quality of poetry and, above all, to the fact that it exists in a sea of other textual, material language, rather than as a separate poetic discourse existing within its own rarefied tradition.

(*ibid.*: 122)

The Ground Aslant (2011) is an anthology of ‘radical landscape poetry’ edited by Tarlo that brings together diverse poets using these techniques to address landscape.

I will end by offering some examples of Modernist technique in contemporary landscape poetry that begin to answer the criteria raised by Heise, Thomashow, Plumwood and others – poetry using ‘found materials’ or influenced by the ‘open field’ techniques developed by Charles Olson and the Black Mountain poets. For a twist of scale in poetic response to landscape, here is J.H. Prynne writing about South Dakota:

All no more than
 a land in drift
 curled over and dry, but
 buried way under the ice
 and as spillway for these
 glacial waters the
 scented air
 runs easily into the
 night and while
 the public hope is as
 always the
 darkened ward
 the icecap will
 never melt
 again why
 should it

-from 'If There is a Stationmaster at Stamford S.D. Hardly So' (1969)
 (*Pryne 2005: 45*)

The movement of land in the process of geological change is too slow for the time-scale of human sense-experience, but here a shift of scale makes it visible, speeding it up to the pace of human or animal body-movement in search of shelter (curled over and dry), and the movement of reading too. Or, for landscape as mesh of energies, here is Peter Larkin addressing hillside trees continually flexing:

Trees pale in knot but nowhere in cooped flux of them, not-bending swivels a sky fold-
 lessly relenting. Leaning skyward can't suffer on the slant, only drawn off slope by the
 unholdable intimacy of vertical separation.

-from 'Lean Earth Off Trees Unaslant, 3'
 (*Tarlo 2011: 70*)

Or compare the regular lines and compact stanzas of landscape-description in Philip Larkin's
 'The Whitsun Weddings' or 'Here' with the spaces opened up by Tarlo:

steady yourself on a grass

late ragwort
 late clover
 the way up meal hill
 plashy donkey steps
 green berries
 all the green berries
 hawthorn gone to berry
 first blackberries
 heather out stretching
 nab purple
 shining irregular edge

-from 'Nab'
 (*Tarlo 2011: 140*)

In the Philip Larkin prospect poems, the landscape is sharply observed but clearly set at a distance. The description is tightly controlled and measured out, each metonymic detail standing for a conceptual whole. In the Tarlo, the spaces imply the physical process of the hill-walk: the body moving and pausing, the eye casting around. They place the person in the scene, encouraging speaker and reader to acknowledge the excessiveness of a landscape that is not represented whole, but experienced as part of a larger continuum of space and time.

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