

Landscape in Theory: a multidisciplinary symposium

26 June 2008

Machicado Suite, Willoughby Hall, University of Nottingham

Minutes

Introduction

Professor Stephen Daniels, Director of AHRC Landscape and Environment Programme welcomed the delegates to the event. He thanked the sponsors – The University of Nottingham's Humanities Research Centre, The Leverhulme Trust, The AHRC Landscape and Environment Programme and The Landscape Research Group.

Professor Daniels then introduced the theme of the symposium stating that among the virtues, and troubles, of landscape as a concept is that it has a wide resonance, among scholars (from many disciplines), practitioners and the laity as one public among many, and that could emerge as a central issue, part of a wider conversation about the language of landscape, perhaps not just in words but in terms of many modes of articulation. He went on to express that the coupling of Landscape and Theory is not a conventional one (say compared with theory and space, place and nature), which was one of the challenges of this symposium.

Presentations - session 1

The three panellists were introduced by the chair, Professor Daniels.

David Matless, Professor of Cultural Geography, University of Nottingham. David's paper focussed on the theme of 'regional cultural landscape' and was illustrated by his own work in East Anglia.

WJT Mitchell, Professor of English Art History, University of Chicago. Professor Mitchell's paper, 'An American drifter in Israel-Palestine: Reflections on a contested landscape' focussed on what makes landscape a useful tool for focussing on the moral and political forces that divide people from one another.

Anne Whiston Spirn, Professor of Landscape Architecture, MIT. Her paper 'Reflections on landscape in theory and practice' looked at how *landscape* and *nature* relate to her own discipline of landscape architecture and on the reciprocal relationship of theories of landscape and the practice of landscape design and planning. Within this context she spoke about two of her own works and also the West Philadelphia Landscape Project where literacy in landscape language has enabled the people of 'Mill Creek' neighbourhood to read the environmental, social, economic and political stories embedded in their local landscape and has given them a way to formulate new stories.

Professor Daniels introduced the respondents,

Sophie Thomas, Lecturer in English, University of Sussex where she also convenes the MA in Literature, Film and Visual Culture. Her recent book, *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* (Routledge, 2008), investigates the crosscurrents between visual culture and literary texts in the period, focusing on a variety of "sites" of seeing, and on the impact of new visual media on the literary and historical imagination. Her current research project, on ruins, fragmentary objects and collections in the Romantic period, includes a consideration of the landscapes of archaeological sites and their representations--for example, as panoramas and models.

Kenneth Olwig, Professor in Landscape Planning at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences where he specializes in landscape theory and history. His interests range from the effect of cultural perceptions of nature and landscape in regional development, to the role of ideas of law and justice in shaping the political landscape and its physical manifestations.

The respondents reflected on the three papers' collective theme of how landscapes are read and their meanings.

Presentations – session 2

The three afternoon panellists were introduced by the chair for the session Julie Sanders, Professor of English and Drama, University of Nottingham.

Tim Ingold, Professor of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen. In his latest research he has been exploring three themes: the dynamics of pedestrian movement, the creativity of practice, and the linearity of writing. These issues come together in his current project, funded by a 3-year ESRC Professorial Fellowship (2005-08), entitled 'Explorations in the comparative anthropology of the line'. His paper entitled 'Landscape or the weather-world?' explored the theories of how people perceive the world around them. Is this just merely the observation of surfaces or does it include the experience of lights, sound and feeling of *medium* and *substances* such as the air, sky and light which are phenomena of the "weather-world"?

Mike Pearsor, Professor of Performance Studies, University of Aberystwyth. He trained as an archaeologist. Between 1972 and 1997 - in a series of companies - he pioneered new and innovative approaches to the form, function and placement of performance. He currently works with departmental colleague Mike Brookes in the Pearson/Brookes company as well as creating solo performances. He recently completed a project 'Carrlands' for the AHRC Landscape and Environment programme www.carrlands.org.uk. His paper 'Landscape in theory: performance' he discusses the emergence of performativity in the social sciences and as an aesthetic practice through past models in performance studies.

Kate Chedgzoy, Professor Renaissance Literature, University of Newcastle. Her recent publications including 'Women, Gender, and the Politics of Location' in Dymphna Callaghan, ed. *The Impact of Feminism on Renaissance Studies* (2006) and her book *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World: Memory, Place and History, 1550-1700* (2007) have investigated the cultural

geographies of early modern women's writing. A new project is concerned with the history of childhood; her paper for 'Landscape in Theory' is a preliminary sketch of some issues she plans to explore there, focussing on how children perceive their environment and the impact that landscape in childhood has on future meanings.

Julie Sanders introduced the three respondents to the papers.

Angela Piccini is an RCUK Fellow in Drama: Theatre, Film, Television at the University of Bristol. She trained in art history and archaeology and continues to investigate the production of place and space in small-screen documentary, from the ways in which screen media actively and 'performatively' make place to the fluid materialities of production and reception contexts. She is principal investigator on the AHRC Landscape and Environment Network 'Living in the Material World: Performativities of Emptiness'.

John Wylie is a cultural geographer writing on issues of landscape, embodiment and performance, and more widely on geographical epistemology and ontology. Much of his work has sought to develop a practice-based and broadly phenomenological approach to landscape and the body. He attempts through his writing and picturing, to present critical and creative accounts of landscape practices of watching, reflecting and moving. He has authored a textbook *Landscape* (Routledge, 2007), which reviews the various uses of the concept within geography. Recently he's begun to think of landscape in terms of haunting rather than dwelling, absence rather than presence.

Matthew Johnson is Professor of Archaeology at the University of Southampton. He has written five books, the most recent *Ideas of Landscape* (2007) looks at the relationships between Romanticism, the landscape historian WG Hoskins, and the theory and practice of landscape archaeology.

The future of landscape and the moving image

Following the two presentation sessions there was an hour long session involving 'The future of landscape and the moving image' project team from the AHRC Landscape and Environment programme. This involved *Patrick Keiller*, Filmmaker and Research Fellow, Royal College of Art in conversation with *Patrick Wright*, Professor of Cultural Studies, Nottingham Trent University, *Doreen Massey*, Professor of Geography, Open University and the Postgraduate student on the project, *Matthew Flintham*. Patrick Keiller showed excerpts from his forthcoming film and spoke about the camera subjects chosen and the exchanges with his colleagues regarding the temporalities and reconciliatory aspects of landscape and images of landscape, and how these figure in cinema.

Plenary discussion

A plenary discussion followed.....