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Place and the Geographical Imagination

Stephen Daniels

ABSTRACT: The study of place is being revived in geographical teaching and research. This reflects a wider recognition of the power of place in the constitution and description of society. Place is central to conservationist and consumerist ideologies, in their emphasis on local and global thought and action. Advertising, literature and the visual arts offer scope for geographers to analyse senses of place and the power relations they imply. Current analytical methods include iconography, thick description and narration. The physiographic character of place needs to be re-affirmed to emphasise the ecological relation of land and life as well as its imaginative dimension. A sense of place should be implicated in the very process of geographical education, in topic-based teaching, in field work and in the presentation of knowledge.

The study of places will be emphasised in the new era of National Curriculum Geography. This insistence may puzzle colleagues in other subjects, even the public at large. Study places, isn't that what geographers already do? Yes, but for years of course geographers have been studying a lot else besides: processes, systems, structures, theories, ideologies, images, models, methodologies, techniques. Many advances in analytical expertise enhanced our understanding of places, but in the process place was displaced as the primary focus of geographical enquiry, its currency devalued. Places were often reduced to case studies, or illustrations. It is not just that the complex, synthetic character of various places has been overlooked, but according to some 'Back to Basics' pundits (*Independent*, 1988), there has been a serious decline in locational and topographical knowledge. The National Curriculum re-focusses on place. A key element of the Statutory Order for Geography is a "knowledge and an understanding of places" – their "distinctive features", "identity", "similarities and differences", and defining mix of "themes and issues".

The study of place is being revived in geographical research. Terms like 'locality', 'landscape', 'region', and 'place' are frequent in both empirical and methodological study. It is not just that specific places are being studied, but the very idea of 'place', the different ways it is conceived, is a focus of enquiry. In this lecture I will survey this new field of geographical enquiry in which the study of place and places is being revalued,

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concentrating on concepts, sources and methods and looking for points of connection between research agenda and teaching curricula.

In particular I want to address two, arguably related, issues, which GA President Eleanor Rawling has raised in regard to place studies in the National Curriculum: first, the move from “knowing about” places in an objective way, their facts and features, to “understanding” places in a more empathetic way, their character and meanings; second, the move from a narrowly geographical focus on place, on what happens where and why, to a broader, inter-disciplinary consideration of themes like citizenship and conservation (Rawling, 1991). I will argue that such manoeuvres do not stray from the geographical path into a realm of what a former Secretary of State for Education termed “vague concepts and attitudes” (Baker, 1991); rather they recognise the many paths of geography, its promise as a field of enquiry. To emphasise place awareness or consciousness is not to ascend into some ethereal realm, rather it is to reclaim geography’s imaginative ground.

The power of place

The revaluation of place in geography is part of a broader revaluation of place in the social sciences. Modern processes and patterns of economic, social and political change, for long seen as place-transcending, even place-homogenising, are now seen as conditioned by place, its cultural context and concrete particulars (Agnew, 1989). The recent General Election revealed the place-conditioning of British electoral politics, at a local scale, from Bath to Billericay. Small town business (Cooke, 1989), local government (Harloe *et al.*, 1990), gay neighbourhoods (Jackson, 1989), urban parks (Burgess *et al.*, 1988), pit-head strikes and parish bell-ringing (Johnston, 1991), are just a few of the place-based topics in recent research. There is a populist aspect to this research, an emphasis on cultural differences which were often overridden in social science, but the focus on place is not just a form of cultural recovery; this is how the world seems to work. Arguably it is the very acceleration in the flows of people, money and information, which has brought place into focus, both as an expression of these flows and as a form of resistance to them (Agnew, 1989; Featherstone, 1990).

The study of place is not just a form of local knowledge. As the boundaries of the nation-state have become increasingly permeable to social and economic flows, and as the idea of the ‘nation’ has been put into question, so a whole range of other places and place identities have come into view, from the parish to the globe. It is conventional now, at least in the West, to think of the world as a coherent place, a ‘whole-earth’, ‘one-world’, a place as much in need of our protection and participation as the street where we live (Wombell, 1989). This is unlike the old imperial world, with its reassuring myths of order, a place for everything and everything in its place, maps where capes and bays could be confidently fixed. The contours of place now seem to be in flux (Ley, 1989).

The notion of place as a coherent, if often ephemeral, expression of the dynamics of modernisation, is central to Robert Sack’s work on consumerism: “The actions of mass consumerism are among the most powerful and pervasive place-building processes in the modern world” (Sack, 1988 p. 643). Buying goods not only moulds our consciousness of places but helps us construct new ones, however ephemeral. It does so not just through the material of the objects, or their effect on spatial and social relations, but through their images and meanings. Buying a car is a prime exercise in place formation, but also buying much else: clothes, holidays, hoovers, food, bath oil. Advertising is central to the place-constitution of commodities. Many adverts weave desirable worlds for commodities, in the process unravelling the less desirable worlds where the things are produced. There is magic to this place-making, but, like some conjuring, it tends playfully to reveal its hand; “it’s only an ad”. Totally commercial places, such as department stores or supermarkets are

themselves life-sized advertisements. We can pick and mix from the world over in creating the geographies of everyday life: "a bit of France in French Provincial, a bit of China in a Chinese restaurant, and a whole world in Disneyland" (Sack, 1988 p. 661).

This consumerist version of place as pastiche stands opposed to conservationist versions of place which emphasise virtues of stability, tradition, authenticity and care. Conservationist place philosophy has both a patrician and a populist dimension. The Prince of Wales recently set out to re-enchant Britain with a spirit of place, in a hierarchical vision culminating in St Paul's Cathedral (Prince of Wales, 1989). Image-making is no less central to this conservationist version of place than it is to consumerist versions: the Prince's "Vision of Britain" is framed by oil paintings and by Old Masters. There is magic too, but it tends to be of a more pious kind than in advertising: mystery, majesty, the Royal Touch. On a more populist level, Common Ground's Parish Maps initiative in part of a project of "celebrating and looking after your place", the familiar and everyday sites, views, buildings, trees, animals, the "commonplace" things that a consciously local community needed to recognise, respect and protect (Common Ground, 1987). Parish maps, in a variety of styles and media, are intended as portraits of places, reflecting what inhabitants value (Figs. 1 and 2). In choosing the parish, "an enduring and ancient institution", this project implies a larger geographical communion, although not necessarily an Anglican, or even English one. Some of Common Ground's philosophy has a pagan, archetypal register that is cross-cultural.

Conservationist place-consciousness has an international currency. In response to the Columbian quincentenary, and five centuries of "brutal and avaricious plunder" of the American continent and its indigenous peoples, Barry Lopez appeals for a new "philosophy of place" one of dwelling, stewardship and intimate understanding:

We would have to memorize and remember the land, walk it, eat from its soils and from the animals that ate its plants. We would have to know its winds, inhale its airs, observe the sequence of its flowers in the spring and the range of its birds. To be intimate with the land like this is to enclose it in the same moral universe we occupy, to include it in the meaning of "community" (Lopez, 1992 p. 6).

This "would mean being in a place, taking up residence in a place", although not perhaps for Barry Lopez who had to travel far and wide to consult with wise men in remote places to frame his philosophy: 'A Nunamiut man at Anaktuvuk pass in the Brooks Pass in the Brooks Range in Alaska . . . a Kamba man in Kenya . . . in the stone desert west of Lake Turkana . . . ' (Lopez, 1992). There is no necessary contradiction in this notion of place; it fits with the conservationist combination of global and local thinking. To be intimate with your patch of land is to bring you into a worldwide communion of fellow intimates, a sort of pan-tribalism.

Consumerist and conservationist versions of place arguably overlap, or are perhaps two sides of the same modern, or post-modern, sensibility. Large corporations are now keen to broadcast their care for the planet and its aboriginal inhabitants in advertising imagery or in the make-up of the products themselves. Benetton used a tribal, one-world, image to sell its colourful clothes; the Body Shop has pioneered cosmetics which mix Western care with Third World charisma. The combination of consumerism and conservation is perhaps most apparent in the place-making of the heritage industry. Heritage place-making is a serious business, intended to market whole regions to potential customers and investors. Themed environments are created from a mixture of retrieval, reconstruction, invention and simulation (Hewison, 1987). The sense of place extends from sights and sounds to smells. Fred Dale of Lytham St. Annes is supplier of smells to the heritage industry: the aroma of the Industrial North for the Wigan Pier heritage centre, the stench of eighteenth-century rural poverty for Lord Montagu's village of Buckler's Hard in Hampshire, and Essence of Viking Latrine for the Jorvik Centre (Greave, 1992).

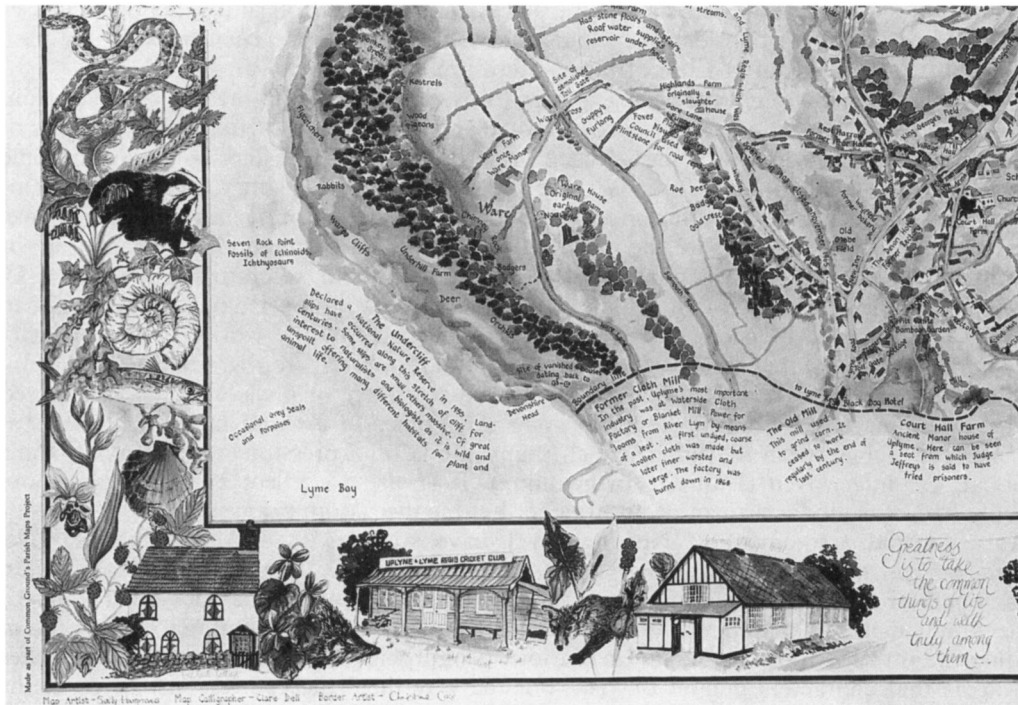
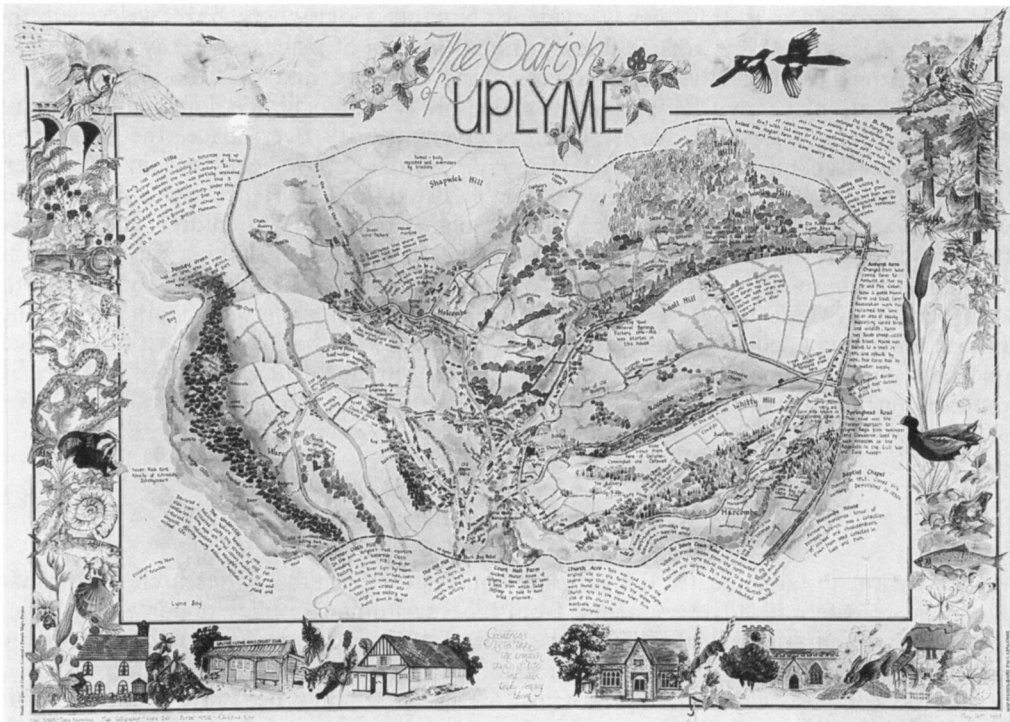


Fig. 2. *The Parish of Uplyme*, detail.

The power of place is thus newly evident. Not all geographers have welcomed this unreservedly. David Harvey worries that consumer images of place, especially as promoted by developers, mask unseemly social processes and tensions, and that the reactivation of older, ecological, place mythologies echoes the blood and soil ideology which stained German geography under the Nazis. Place is given priority over space, the stability of being over the dynamics of becoming (Harvey, 1990). This issue is as old as western civilisation, between (to use Matthew Arnold's distinction) a Hellenistic culture which privileged place with deep significance, and denigrated those who didn't as subversive drifters eroding ties to family and locality, and a Hebraic culture which privileged time, and denigrated those who worshipped the pagan gods of place as idolaters obscuring the God of history (Tuan, 1984). I will not pretend to resolve this issue either way, but maintain that any adequate conception of place needs to be situated within it. Place should be seen as a fluent not a fixed concept, not a settlement in the field of enquiry but a contested terrain (Daniels, 1989).

Mapping a sense of place

My discussion so far indicates the range of sources for place-based research – from data on financial transfers to advertisements, from local customs to policy documents. If there is something which connects these sources, indeed gives shape to current conceptions of place in geographic thought, it is a notion of culture. This is culture conceived in an enlarged and complex way, denoting not just art works or lifestyle, but a realm of values and activities in which it is difficult to disassociate the economic from the aesthetic, the social from the political, the real from the representational (Daniels, 1989). This is not to forget more traditional geographic topics like land use and settlement patterns, which, after all, tell us more about the culture of places than some 'form and function' analyses suggest. Here I want to consider two kinds of sources which have been increasingly used to gain purchase on people's sense of place: literature and the visual arts.

It has long been customary for geographers to use landscape paintings or passages from novels to illustrate or enliven their accounts of places, or even to extract a few nuggets of factual information. During the past decade or so, literary and artistic works have become primary geographical sources. Initially these focussed, somewhat softly, on the *content* of works, for evidence of the author's or artist's perceptions of, or feeling about, a place, with usually little attention to the *form* of the works (say methods or narration or figuration), or to the cultural context of their production or reception (Daniels, 1985). Subsequently the formal and contextual aspects of literature and art have been brought to the fore. This has both specified the literariness or artistry of the works, and opened up their connections to other kinds of sources: economic, political, topographical and so on. This has not been to establish a 'real' place of hard economic or physical facts, as opposed to distinguishing a more impressionistic 'imaginary' place in art and literature. Rather it has mapped out a cultural field in which many kinds of expression, some factual, some fictional, are interwoven (Daniels, forthcoming). It is also to reflect on geography more broadly and critically as a form of knowledge. Let me discuss an example.

As a tutorial assignment at Nottingham I have students read Alan Sillitoe's novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), a novel about Nottingham in the late 1950s. This is part of a longer project on the geography of the city which includes other kinds of sources and methods, from census work to field-walking and trail-making. The point of reading the novel is to discriminate the various geographies of the book, not just the sites and areas that characters inhabit or visit, but the way these places are constructed in the text, geographies as different forms of knowledge. Sources other than the novel are deployed, works on Nottingham, and on the cultural climate of the time, and not least

some writings by Sillitoe in which he reflects on his craft, making some points about the central role of place and place-consciousness in his novels, which can be extended to many novels by others, and arguably to the novel itself as a genre.

In an essay entitled "Maps", Sillitoe explains the importance of cartography to his craft (Sillitoe, 1975). From school age, when he "watched with wonder and fascination" the teacher take an inked metal cylinder and roll a gleaming outline of a country or continent on page, to his use of navigation charts in the RAF, maps of all kinds have been a form of magical revelation (Figs. 3 and 4). Memory, imagination, education itself, have been mediated by maps. In some recent research, including interviews with the author, Simon Rycroft and I have discriminated the various kinds of formal geographic conventions, from photogrammetry to topographical mapping, which inform descriptions in Sillitoe's novel, conventions which offer a comprehensive but distanced and rather official view. We have also explored the more intimate, more intuitive, less formal, less official geographies in the works, the knowledge of those characters whose horizons are enclosed (Rycroft, 1991). In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* this is the geographical knowledge of our hero, the prowling, predatory Arthur Seaton, living largely on his wits, but whose movements are plotted by the cool cartographic eye of the author. In a recent sequel, *The Open Door* (Sillitoe, 1989), it is Arthur Seaton's brother Brian, trained abroad like Sillitoe in the RAF, who is given a more cartographic view of the world, a world beyond Nottingham. The differences between the brothers extend to their seduction of other men's wives, Arthur chatting up Brenda in a pub, Brian tracing a map on Nora's back.

Sillitoe's is a man's world, a world of masculine adventurism. His female characters tend to be less place-based than place-bound: they are enclosed, diminished by the roving geographical imagination which offers such scope to the Arthurs and Brians of this world. The very attention to the varieties of geographical experience in novels reveals place as an index of social as well as spatial location, with people who are put in their place, excluded from some places and confined to others. In English novels, as in the culture at large, homes and gardens are often envisaged as feminine spaces, but, sometimes identified as arenas of resourcefulness, even independence. Mandy Morris, a post-graduate at Nottingham, has analysed the complex geographies of gender, class and race in Frances Burdett's children's classic, *The Secret Garden*. The garden, and control of it, form the focus of a world which extends from bracing Yorkshire moorland to a cholera-stricken community in colonial India. It is the transgression of place boundaries, not least those of the secret garden, which brings the geographies of the novel into focus (Morris, forthcoming).

The visual arts offer enormous potential to geography, which is, after all, a highly visual discipline. A training in map reading, field sketching, photogrammetry or computer graphics offers scope for analysing painting, photography and film. In a project at Nottingham on the 'Making of Constable Country', we have studied the relation and overlap between various pictorial media in the creation and conservation of a cultural region: Constable's paintings, travel photography, advertisements. Constable Country emerges as not just a locality, the stretch of the Stour Valley where the artist painted, but an epitome of larger issues, the nation, its health and heritage (Bishop, 1991; Daniels, 1991; Gruffudd, 1991). Constable's paintings have been enlisted in various campaigns against the despoliation of England's green and pleasant land, and to promote the virtues of various commodities from mineral water to breakfast cereal. Jordan's 'Original Crunchy' is like Constable's 'original' *Cornfield*, unspoiled by chemical fertilisers or pesticides (Figs. 5 and 6). Constable Country is a place that is, in an exact way, consumed, "a country of the taste buds, stomach and bowels", nor merely a place "of the mind", but "a gut feeling too" (Bishop, 1991, p. 36).

But whose country is this? The muesli-eating classes of the home counties, the white middle-class who have, in the past decades, increasingly colonised the countryside, both as residents and visitors? Such pictures of England, and the heritage they presume, have been

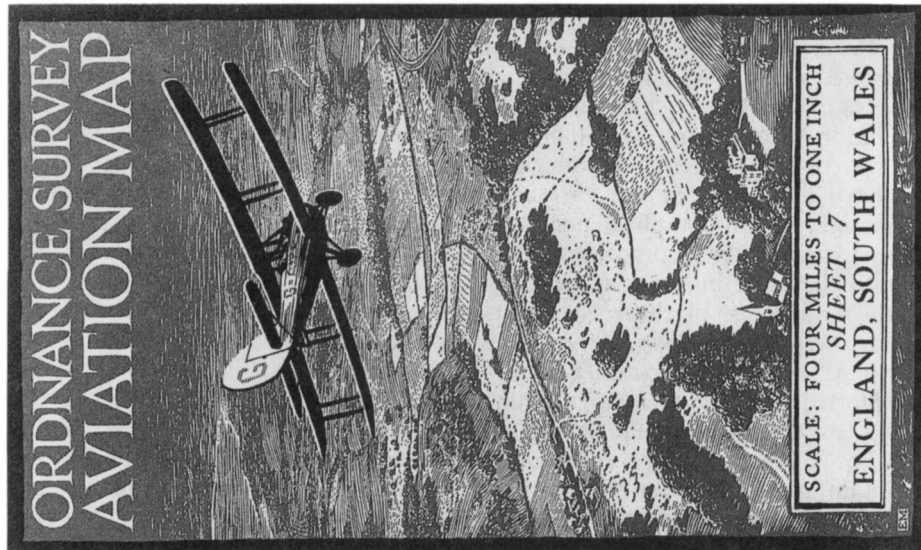


Fig. 4. Ellis Martin, Cover of *Ordnance Survey Aviation Map, England, South Wales*, (1931).

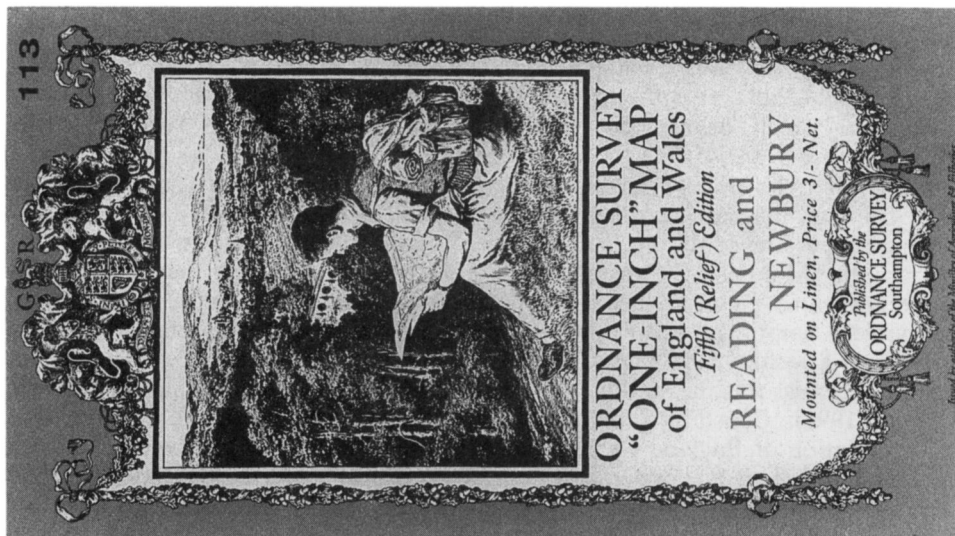


Fig. 3. Ellis Martin, Cover of *Ordnance Survey 'One Inch' Map, Reading and Newbury*, Fifth (Relief) Edition (1933).



Fig. 5. John Constable, *The Cornfield* (detail), engraving from *Art Journal* (1869).

Most people prefer the original.

We don't believe anyone really wants to go back to days of yore. But we do think people want to eat a tasty, healthy food.

So what's the point in us using no additives or preservatives in our breakfast cereals if the farmer has already sprayed the crop up to six times before it gets to our mill?

That's why all of the cereals in Jordans Original Crunchy are grown to Conservation Grade standards. Right from the ploughing stage, the farmer is under strict supervision. Over 200 agro-chemicals are banned. Only specially selected inputs which leave no potentially harmful residues in food or the soil are allowed. Which means that every grain in Jordans Original is more like the ones which grew in John Constable's original.

People Maintenance.

JORDANS
CONSERVATION GRADE
ORIGINAL CRUNCHY
TOASTED OAT CEREAL
with Honey, Almonds & Raisins

Fig. 6. Advert for Jordans Original Crunchy (1987). Reproduced by kind permission of W. Jordan (Cereals).

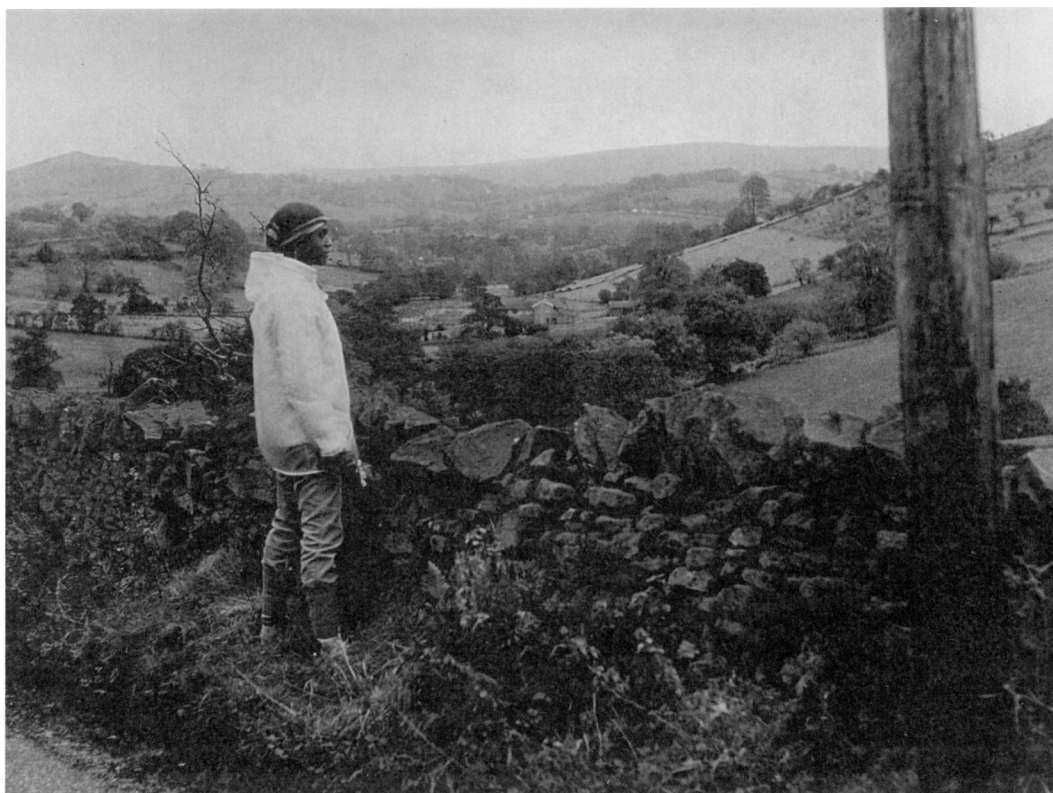


Fig. 7. Ingrid Pollard, *Pastoral Interludes* (1988). © Ingrid Pollard, reproduced by kind permission of Ingrid Pollard.

put into question by Ingrid Pollard's photographs. The caption to one of the Lake District reads: "I wandered lonely as a black face in a sea of white". Pollard grew up with the Wordsworthian image – "Daffodils" was her father's favourite poem – but when she went to the Lakes she felt like hiding; she felt out of place. It is customary to think of cities as places of unease and fear, especially for women at night, but not the countryside in broad daylight. Pollard's photographs seek, in her words, "to restate myself in the landscape", to reclaim it as a place for a Black woman (Pollard, 1989) (Fig. 7). Why haven't Britain's ethnic minorities shared in the discovery of countryside? It is an issue that the Black Environment Network, founded by geography teacher Julian Agyeman, is seeking, in various ways (including using images like Ingrid Pollard's), to look at more closely and change (Coster, 1989). Photography, like cartography, has been a key form of geographic knowledge, necessarily selective, often strategic, in its depiction of people and place. It would be revealing to set Pollard's photographs beside those of colonial scenes in geography texts from Britain's imperial era.

Showing and telling

The new conceptual importance of place in geographical research has been attended by some methodological innovations, or rather renovations. Two prominent methods of place study may be seen as restatements of past ones: description and narration.

Description, written description, suffered a bad press in the quantitative revolution; 'mere description' it was called, as opposed to numerical analysis. Description is now seen to be a more powerful, more subtle, indeed a more analytical method than its critics presumed (Cosgrove, 1989). This is in part because writing, rather than mathematics or statistics, is now a focus of reflection by geographers, and because literary theory, rather than physical or economic theory, is upheld as an exemplar. At issue is not so much how places function as what they mean. Metaphors, not models, are in vogue; and the fashionable metaphor for places is not that of a system but that of a text. The phrase 'reading the landscape' has been given precise meaning (Barnes and Duncan, 1992).

'Mere description' has been transformed, like those weaklings in body-building ads, into the more substantial 'thick description', a muscular method, prized for its strength and suppleness. The term 'thick description' comes from ethnography, from attempts to make sense of the complex layers or dimensions of meaning in cultural rituals by describing them in detail from many points of view, situating their 'texts' in terms of many 'contexts'. Thick description is esteemed as a way of capturing both the singularity of social episodes and disclosing broad issues about the society in which they occur, even social life as such (Geertz, 1973). Thick description has affinities with the art historical method of iconography, the interpretation of symbolic imagery in art works and artifacts (Daniels and Cosgrove, 1988). These methods have been extended by geographers to the interpretation of places, particularly to places with a strong mythological resonance. To describe the many meanings of the New York World Building (Domosh, 1989), St Paul's Cathedral (Daniels, forthcoming), Venice (Cosgrove, 1982), Stonehenge (Bender, 1992) or Shangri La (Bishop, 1989) is not just to enhance our understanding of these places, but to diagnose much about the cultures at large in which they are situated and esteemed. It is not the uniqueness of these places which is at issue, but their *specificity*. It is not only symbolically central places which specify a culture but also what Rob Shields calls "places on the margin", places like Brighton whose very "accessibility from London made it an ideal site for socially marginal activities – carnivals of desire and explosions of unrest" (Shields, 1991, p. 4). And there are those makeshift places Colin Ward and his colleagues have described; places like plotlands and allotments which are marginal to the regulations of officialdom (Hardy and Ward, 1984; Crouch and Ward, 1985).

In specifying the shifting meaning of such places, thick descriptions often amount to narrations. Narrative, like description, has been rescued from condescension, redeemed as a method with a powerful purchase on the understanding of place (Daniels, 1985). In a sustained analysis of the role of place in social science, Nick Enrikin argues that narrative offers a valuable vantage point for the understanding of place, between a de-centred, objective view (place as location) and a centred, subjective view (place as consciousness). Narrative combines a respect for facts with a concern for the intentional connections between people and their surroundings (Enrikin, 1991). Narrative is not just a matter of chronology, but of configuring facts in terms of certain themes and issues. Narrating places involves configuring the relevant objects and events, 'plotting', in both a spatial and temporal sense, their meanings. Any author attempting to write narratives of places realises the complexity of the task. It is not just a question of connecting the grand narratives of historical-geographical transition to local happenings, but of taking account of the histories, allegories, homilies and legends which gather in and around places, of telling stories about stories.

Land and life

So far I have emphasised place as the context of social relations, as a cultural construction; I have said little about the physical character of places, their topographical, elemental aspect. Physical geography has been largely ignored in recent writing about

place, indeed in much human geography. David Stoddart is dismayed to discover that many human biographers have persuaded themselves “that the physical world does not exist”:

Geographers have forgotten – it is extraordinary to say so – that some parts of the Earth are high, others low; some wet, others dry; some desert, others covered by forest and grassland and ice. No one ever seems to mention these days that two-thirds of the surface of the planet is covered by the sea. These are the elemental categories of human existence in which geography must deal (Stoddart, 1987, p. 331).

Stoddart looks to the environmental tradition of Carl Sauer, one embodied by the landmark symposium *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth*, “a book about the physical earth and man's relationship with it, on a vast and panoramic scale. Reading it you feel the dust in your eyes, the sand between your toes, the salt spray on your face. It is a palpable, tangible, real world, peopled by the real men and women who have transformed it” (Stoddart, 1987, p. 330).

Stoddart is impatient with “our contemporary obsession with minutiae of our own affluent and urbanised society”, with such topics as “geographic influences of the Canadian cinema, or the distribution of fast-food outlets in Tel-Aviv”, calling geographers to deal with such places as rural Bangladesh – “a very physical place” (Stoddart, 1987, p. 334). It is an old complaint about the corruption of the metropolis, its consuming passion for images, its disdain for the challenging, down-to-earth realities of rural areas, especially in remote places. But it does point to the erosion of a palpable, physical dimension of the world in a geographical perspective which locates place at the intersection of ‘society and space’, not that of ‘land and life’. I am thinking not just of rural land and life, of fields and forests, sand and salt spray, but of the palpable make-up, morphology and atmosphere of towns and cities.

Perhaps the best example of this environmental tradition in England is the work of W. G. Hoskins. Hoskins (1955) was attentive to the elemental character of various places – wood, water, rock, air – and its shaping through a long history of human occupation. The character of places was animated, for better or worse, in their physical form and appearance, their physiognomy. While Hoskins was a connoisseur of local places, which reflected local customs and materials, he was attentive to broader geographies of people and resources. And his was never a conventionally scenic, aesthetic vision. He said somewhere that on a wet November evening the Leicester suburb of Wigston Magna offers an exquisitely depressing experience that is central to an English sense of place.

Recognising the physical form and features of places, helps revise the notion of the geographical imagination as a purely subjective faculty, a mental state or projection which enlivens or obscures an objective, but inert world. To quote James Hillman:

All things show faces, the world not only as a coded signature to be read for meaning, but a physiognomy to be faced. As expressive forms things speak; they show the shape they are in . . . They regard us beyond how we may regard them, our perspectives, what we intend with them, and how we dispose of them (Hillman, 1982 p. 77).

Education through geography

From an educational perspective, place might be more than a matter of certain places out there – towns, villages, regions, whatever – prescribed for study. Geographer John Pickles has argued that place should be implicated in the very process of teaching and learning, a process that should be less concerned with the transmission and repetition of information and more with participation in a dialogue about a certain topic. It is a

classical model not just of understanding, but of citizenship. "Topos" is the root meaning in Greek of both topic and place. The topic is the place, the arena where the speaker and audience meet and participate. The dialogue starts with the shared commonplaces, moving, through a process of argument, criticism, and reflection to some new ground of knowledge. It is a process of exploration (Pickles, 1985).

I am reminded of the idea of fieldwork set out over thirty years ago in Carl Sauer's Presidential Address to the Association of American Geographers, entitled "The Education of a Geographer":

I like to think of any young field group as on a journey of discovery, not as a surveying party . . . The student and the leader are in a running exchange of questions and promptings supplied from the changing scene, engaging in a peripatetic form of Socratic dialogue about qualities of and in the landscape. Locomotion should be slow, the slower the better, and be often interrupted by leisurely halts to sit on vantage points and stop at question marks (Sauer, 1976).

Yes, I know fieldwork is often, in practice, not so Socratic or convivial as this, with a group of reluctant students in the cold and wet. But I have borne it in mind on the excursions I have designed and led. If Sauer's was a rough, rural vision, "being afoot, sleeping out, sitting about camp in the evening", fieldwork can be more urbane, wandering streets, and relaxing in cafes. Cities have their vantage points and question marks too.

For some years Denis Cosgrove and I ran a field course to Venice and its region, focussing on the design and management of its landscape. We framed the course in terms of the idea of 'theatre'. This was not merely because of the consciously theatrical character of the places we studied – the stage-like piazzas, the scenic views, the performative nature of civic culture; we wanted to draw attention to a theatrical mode of enquiry with strong roots in the Renaissance (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1989). A theatre might be not just a playhouse, but a conspectus, a place where things are presented graphically for public understanding. Hence atlases or books of geographical description which were titled 'theatres' of empire or of the world, or lecture theatres for the display of various kinds of knowledge, from cosmography to anatomy, or memory theatres in which all knowledge was envisaged as a landscape of images (Daniels and Cosgrove, in press). Here the geographical imagination enters explicitly into the very process of learning, not as a passive form of spectatorship, but an active one: observation, speculation, and, to use a word with its roots in the idea of theatre, theorising (Bishop, 1992). We should attend to place as a medium as well as an object of study. The places for the presentation of geographical knowledge – the library, the classroom, the essay, the book – these places matter as much as those places – the city, the village, the region – about which we research and teach.

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