

Space, Place and Landscape: a Postgraduate Workshop

This collection of papers is the result of a workshop organised specifically as an opportunity for the work of postgraduate students from the University of Nottingham to be presented and discussed in an open forum. The workshop took place in July 2007 and was arranged to coincide with the first of two Leverhulme Trust sponsored visits as part of a Visiting Professorship to the University of Nottingham by W.J.T. Mitchell, a Professor of English and Art History from the University of Chicago. The postgraduate workshop was one of a series of events that were staged to engage Professor Mitchell with intellectual debates at the University of Nottingham; these included a symposium for the discussion of visual culture and an international conference themed around ‘Literary Geographies.’

Professor Mitchell has published widely on a range of issues that cut across academic disciplines, including landscape, visual theory and literature. Taking inspiration from Professor Mitchell’s 1994 (second edition 2002) publication *Landscape and Power*¹ it was agreed to convene a workshop that would allow postgraduates from a range of disciplines to present work that related to the loosely formulated theme ‘Space, Place and Landscape.’ Postgraduate students across the arts, humanities, and social sciences at the University of Nottingham were invited to submit papers, the result being a truly interdisciplinary forum, with participants coming from English Studies, Canadian Studies, Geography, Environmental History and Archaeology. In addition, many other departments attended the workshop and involved themselves with the day’s discussions. The workshop was conceived as a means for postgraduate students at varying stages in their study, including MA, MRes, MPhil and PhD students, to select an area of their research to present in the form of a short paper that engaged on some level with literature and theory associated with the terms space, place and landscape. In recent years, these terms have increasingly been deployed and assessed critically by academic disciplines working in the arts and humanities. As Ogborn and Withers point out this is not a straightforward case of academia at large suddenly becoming interested in geographical works. Rather, this should be understood as:

¹ W J T Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

a more general engagement across a range of disciplines with bodies of theory that have brought geographical issues to the fore... more broadly within the humanities, it is possible to trace the increasing influence of, for instance, Michel Foucault's notions of the connections between space, knowledge and power; Jurgen Habermas's theory of communicative action and the public sphere; Raymond Williams's cultural politics of landscape; Edward Said's understanding of the discursive power of imaginative geographies, and Bruno Latour's elaboration of the production of knowledge within networks and their centres of calculation.²

Other examples of influential space/place theorists include Michel De Certeau,³ Henri Lefebvre,⁴ Edward Soja⁵ and Gaston Bachelard,⁶ theorists who, interestingly, appear in both Mitchell's work and the papers presented here, creating an unexpected sense of continuity between Mitchell, other space theorists and the analyses of this collection.

The wealth and depth of research concerned with space, place and landscape can be illustrated in snapshot form by one edited volume *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (2004). This volume includes entries on fifty-two such 'key thinkers' who were selected due to contributions to 'theoretical discussions of the importance of space and place in shaping cultural, social, economic and political life in recent years.'⁷ However, this represents one example of many texts within this area.⁸ With reference to this collection of papers it is worth reflecting on the concepts surrounding the 'trialectics' of space that Henri Lefebvre discusses in *The Production of Space* (1991), as it speaks directly to the notion of there being three strands/concepts that interact to produce space, sentiments that Mitchell builds upon in his own work and reflected upon in detail in his opening lecture

² Miles Ogborn and Charles. W.J. Withers, 'Introduction: Georgian Geographies?' in Miles Ogborn and Charles. W.J. Withers, eds., *Georgian Geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 1-23. (p. 2)

³ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

⁵ Edward W. Soja, 'Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination', in D Massey, J Allen and P Sarre, eds., *Human Geography Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 260-78.

⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* trans. Maria Jolas (East Sussex: Beacon Press, 1994)

⁷ Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine, 'Editor's Introduction', in Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine, eds., *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London: Sage, 2004), p. 1-15.

⁸ See also: Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard, *People and Place: The Extraordinary Geographies of Everyday Life* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2001); Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett and Stan Hawkins, eds., *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, eds., *Revisiting Space : Space and Place in European Cinema* (Oxford: P. Lang, 2005); Simon Coleman and Peter Collins, eds., *Locating the Field : Space, Place and Context in Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Neal Leach, ed. *Rethinking Architecture – A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997); David Harvey, *Consciousness of the Urban Experience* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985).

in the 2007 Visiting Professorship programme. The workshop that foregrounds these papers was put together with the explicit aim of finding out how the terms space, place *and* landscape are being used discursively in current postgraduate work, echoing the notion that reducing spatial analysis to space and place overlooks the importance of landscape in exploring ‘the differential entwining of cultural practices, representations and imaginations’.⁹ However, the lexicon of terms mobilised in these papers is by no means restricted to discussions of space, place and landscape. In addition, it includes references to cities, regions, provinciality, nations, and globalisation – all of which are used to highlight that the boundaries for imaginaries and the spatial are not fixed entities, they work across a range of locations and scales. Following from these observations the workshop welcomed the diversity of approaches to space/place/landscape research at the University of Nottingham.

The remit for the papers that were delivered at this workshop was left open to personal interpretation. Participants were presented with the straightforward proposal to offer some research that engaged with space, place and landscape. The workshop was arranged with some trepidation on behalf of the organisers, mainly due to uncertainties as to how well researchers from disparate disciplines would produce work that related to each other. Would the literary-analysis papers group together in terms of approach and style, particularly as they were coming from two schools: English and Canadian Studies? Would the papers coming from a historical background relate to literary based subject matter? Would meaningful conversation be stimulated across this range of academic disciplines, or would the generalised heading of space, place and landscape be too disparate for connections to form? These questions seem particularly applicable to the postgraduate community where interdisciplinary work does not perhaps have the same profile and is not engaged with as readily as by established academics who actively engage with interdisciplinarity.

The six papers collected here demonstrate how the same terminology and vocabulary is being engaged with by researchers from varying academic backgrounds who deploy different methodologies and draw on a unified theoretical background from

⁹ Ibid (p. 5); see also David Atkinson, Peter Jackson, David Sibley and Neil Washbourne, eds., *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005). (p.42)

an area that has emerged as one of the key themes within the arts and humanities in recent years: space, and the linked terms place and landscape. Rather than a collection of six different statements and interpretations of space/place/landscape these papers reveal an array of crossovers, theoretically, thematically and methodologically. The theoretical paradigm was specified from the outset and acted as a framework for discussion; ultimately, a tangential array of papers was expected due to the disparity of approaches, but what was overwhelming were the multiple other systems, beliefs and ideas that transfer from this theoretical basis to the different schools and disciplines involved in this research. This became apparent within the papers and from discussions on the day.

One important outcome of the Space, Place and Landscape Workshop relates to the mobilisation of variant methodologies by different academic disciplines when addressing themes that are united in terms of theoretical background or base. At this point it is appropriate to split the six papers into two categories – those that produce their readings of space by employing literary techniques (Formby, Smith, Walls) and those that draw on the built environment and architectural form (Craggs, Neate, Soar). However, this is not to suggest a straightforward case of Geographers doing ‘geography’ and Literary Critics doing ‘lit crit.’ Despite the workshop opening alongside and under the title of the main conference ‘Literary Geographies’, also held in July 2007, any binaries between the literary and geographical were quickly eradicated. What can be seen in these papers are some clear examples of how spatial theory has permeated across the arts and humanities, but also how other theories – in this case performance, which in itself is inherently interdisciplinary in nature¹⁰ – are being employed to bring new dimensions to terms such as space, place and landscape.

The archaeological reading of performance and cemetery sites in Prepalatial Crete presented here by Kathryn Soar is informed by spatial and performance theory. Here we see how empirical archaeological evidence can be enlivened when using performance theory to conceive the mobilisation of bodies through architectural space. This is used to complement traditional archaeological studies that focus on economic and administrative

¹⁰ See for example: Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis (Eds) *Drama/Theatre/Performance*. (London: Routledge, 2004)

systems by revealing the role that performance, ceremony and procession can play in terms of underpinning social and ideological systems.

The discussion of the two principal theatres in the city of Nottingham in the 1960s by Hannah Neate demonstrates how taking theatre architecture as a methodological starting point can result in readings of theatre space that complement the work of theatre historians who use repertoires of productions to reconstruct performative space.¹¹ Both papers move towards addressing questions that are central to Performance Studies itself. Namely, how to reconstruct performances from a historical perspective and how spatial theory can make contributions to performative readings of social and cultural practices.¹²

The built environment as a precursor for the reading of ideological landscapes is invoked by Ruth Craggs who presents discourses surrounding modern Commonwealth as being in constant dialogue with architectural and institutional landscapes in central London. By considering ‘interiors and exteriors of individual buildings, their settings within the wider fabric of the city’ we are reminded how cultural and social phenomena can take on meaning when being applied to specific sites – in this case The Commonwealth Institute, Marlborough House and The Royal Commonwealth Society. By locating these sites within wider landscapes of empire, nation and progress we can understand ‘the ways in which they evoked, contested and themselves affected Commonwealth discourses and communities.’

Although also discussing city spaces Zoë Formby draws on Jon McGregor’s 2003 novel *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* to discuss ideas surrounding the spatial location and construction of urban identities. Here, rather than drawing on urban forms and architecture, ideas surrounding how cognitive mapping is deployed throughout texts concerned with the city, especially in contemporary fiction, are revealed through close readings of texts. Work concerned with cognitive mapping and psychological readings of space contributed to a large body of work carried out by behavioural geographers in the 1960s and 1970s. Works such as Lynch’s 1960 *The Image of the City*¹³ and Gould and

¹¹ See for example, Joanne Robinson, 'Mapping Performance Culture: Locating the Spectator in Theatre History', *Nineteenth Century Theatre & Film* No. 31 (2004), p. 3-17.

¹² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993);

Rebecca Schneider, 'Performance Remains', *Performance Research* No. 6 (2001), p. 100-8.

¹³ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).

White's 1974 *Mental Maps*¹⁴ were influential in laying down the foundations for a psychological turn in human geography that looked at how individuals perceived environmental factors in everyday life.¹⁵ However, rather than seeking to use scientific and psychologically informed methods to extract 'readings' of the city, the city is considered to be 'a constant mediating force, impacting upon subjectivity to the extent that inhabitants are constructed, organised and arranged.' The city in McGregor's work is wrapped in notions of the construction of local environment in order for alienated urban dwellers to gain self validation and affirmation of the existence of humanity in the otherwise hostile spaces of the city.

It might seem surprising to geographers to see the likes of Lynch's *The Image of the City* being referred to in current academic papers in view of the important role that it played in forming new geographical outlooks on publication in 1967. However, here is an example of how intellectual ideas prove to have lasting legacies, which leads them to circulating and taking on different and unexpected meanings when critically examined by disciplines outside of the original target audience. Such observations contribute to debates about notions of 'interdisciplinarity' and how academic disciplines can be found to increasingly cross-reference the same theoretical works. Yet, whilst disciplines remain methodologically distinct there remain opportunities for new and continuing debates surrounding the likes of space, place, landscape and performance.

Mitchell's work on 'space, place and landscape' became, then, the guiding force for the explorations of this postgraduate conference. Although not strictly or explicitly referred to in all papers presented, or discussions on the day, the themes, ideas and approaches laid out by Mitchell's work, instructed and informed the analyses.¹⁶ Therefore, it is important to look a little more closely at a few of these ideas to see how the papers responded to them and how the resulting discussions became linked through these explorations. In his opening paragraph of the Preface to the second edition of *Landscape and Power*, Mitchell immediately relates his concerns with the previous considerations of the three terms 'space, place and landscape,' terms which are often used

¹⁴ Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (London: Penguin, 1974).

¹⁵ David Livingstone, *the Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

¹⁶ There was a series of pre-visit reading groups held at the University of Nottingham in May 2007. This series focussed on all of Mitchell's published work and helped to inform the discussions of the day.

synonymously, but in fact have differing associations.¹⁷ Mitchell's problem with the term 'landscape' is at the forefront of this discussion. He states that landscape is often only seen as a background, or has a merely two-dimensional role, due to its associations with pictorial traditions and its opposition to the more three-dimensional conception of space as its relation.¹⁸ The role of landscape and what it actually consists of becomes indeterminate when considering the specifics of actually analysing it – landscape is a term that relies on generality. The dead space of landscape remains in the background as something that can only ever remain 'external' whilst still separated from these other terms. Mitchell questions what landscape is and how we proceed to depicting and understanding the concept accurately, highlighting that landscape is generally the 'overlooked' not the 'looked at.'¹⁹ Mitchell considers what we are actually looking at within the landscape itself, the generality of the idea becomes swept up in a suppressive term that fails to concern itself with what the landscape actually consists of: 'the invitation to look at landscape is an invitation not to look at any specific *thing*, but to ignore all particulars in favour of an appreciation of a total gestalt, a vista or scene.'²⁰ The unreality and removed status of what is landscape is reductive in its failure to acknowledge what that landscape consists of, instead the consideration of landscape becomes an act of looking 'at nothing.'²¹

A positive aspect of the delineation of binary opposition, the one against the other in dialectic studies of space, is a realisation of something in-between, which in turn allows us to move these considerations of space. Mitchell's trinity of terms elides itself with Edward Soja's concept of 'thirdspace.' It is no longer suitable to refer to one side or the other, but to something else that grows from the comparison between the two. As Soja states:

Thirdspace is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings...thirding introduces a critical "other-than" choice that speaks and critiques through its otherness...it does not derive simply from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of

¹⁷ W J T Mitchell, 'Preface to the Second Edition of *Landscape and Power*', *Landscape and Power* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. vii-xv.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.vii.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different.²²

In thirdspace, as Soja notes, what matters are the many interpretations that the tensions within space provide. Similarly, Mitchell's concept of the three terms, space, place and landscape is not limited by a similar 'additive combination' but allows a re-interpretation of the world that is 'other-than' anything we have seen before. This preliminary discussion aims to raise questions about the nature of space that are continued by the papers in this collection.

Will Smith's paper takes regionality as its core and reads space through concepts such as place-voice (a catch word that is dominant in studies of region),²³ everyday practices and regional culture, elements that are helpful in a consideration of the abstract considerations of space. This paper begins by highlighting these abstractions and then drawing them back into relation with the more tangible elements of place to create a complete and complex embodiment of trialectical space studies. All papers presented at the workshop united the small details - a building or location for example - and linked them to the concepts of space, place and landscape. This served to eradicate the binary distinction of dialectics and united ideas and approaches through a continuous analysis of the specific place of the landscape, and what is contained within it, in relation to its wider space. Will Smith does this in his essay through an initial dialectic comparison of two differing regions of Canada: Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland; these regions are then considered in relation to the concerns of Atlantic Canadian literature as a whole. He situates himself in opposition to previous critics who see these regions as separate; instead uniting the picture or landscape of Atlantic Canada through an analysis of its constituent spaces. He directs his analysis to an understanding of the practices occurring within space which aids the three-dimensional realisation of a space that acknowledges the relationship between the subject and their landscape, the region and the country. He argues that this reading of regional practice 'can be seen as a departure from the tendency to read for mimetic details of setting.' As the thread of his argument follows 'neither place can be discussed solely in relation to its landscape' a proposition that parallels

²² Ibid.

²³ Such studies include: Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, *Thinking Space* (London: Routledge, 2000); Walter Feinberg, *Common Schools/Uncommon Identities: National Unity and Cultural Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998)

Mitchell's concerns with the undervaluation of landscape when extracted from space and place.

In another Canadian Studies-derived contribution, Rachel Walls's paper takes an abstracted sense of political subversion, namely that of 'apocalyptic anxiety', and relates it to the specifics of Vancouver fiction. This paper conjoins the political anxiety to its literary embodiment resulting in a sense of 'regional apocalypse,' as the title of the paper demonstrates – the locality of the locale is positioned alongside the abstract in this analysis. As Rachel states, apocalypse is 'global and generational', but also 'geographical.' She looks at these two opposing sensibilities, highlighting the dangers of over-simplification in both accounts. She maintains that there are always difficulties in defining region and exemplifying that definition through one literary embodiment, yet deals with the complexities of this dilemma by again looking at the intricacies of description and realisation. Rachel tackles the problem of defining region by dealing with a critical debate surrounding regional synonymising of Douglas Coupland's work, the West Coast and the Pacific Rim being used interchangeably, a detail which demonstrates that the synonymising of terms is not specific to space, place and landscape but to specific regions as well. In a manner similar to Will Smith's paper Rachel considers global forces, popular culture and the details of everyday regionality to relate the abstract to the tangible, the extensive to the intricate to create a unified and cohesive whole.

The literature papers are united by this sense of continuity but this connection does not necessarily exclude the papers from other schools as the approach of detailing the specifics and relating it to the wider context is just one of the links that is maintained between all six of these diverse papers. The historical and geographical approach to detailing space follows the same trajectory. In fact, the supposed separation between the schools of thought that participated in this workshop is only as large a divide as between Canadian and English literature. Zoë Formby's urban considerations of the post-modern world is distinct from the everyday realities of regionality in Will Smith's literature paper, which are in turn distinguishable from the approaches that historicize space, read them through performance, or consider them as ideological conceptions. Interestingly, we may even find more thematic similarities between Zoë Formby's and Ruth Craggs'

papers as the principles concerning ideological questions and social phenomena in relation to an understanding of specific spaces are separated by their approach but united by sentiment. A further association can be made between Zoë Formby's and Kathryn Soar's ideas on imagined realities, memory and communication, whether between individuals or between an individual and the space.

The links between these papers are manifold and not limited by a literary or geographical approach. The premise is the same in all the papers presented: how do we understand space, place and landscape? And what are the limitations of this kind of analysis or the use of particular terms? The direct objective of this workshop was to raise questions surrounding this issue. The papers presented at the Space, Place and Landscape Workshop that are collected in this online collection show the coverage of a range of locations and historical time periods. Here we can see the likes of the creation of place voice via the coupling of language and topography in the case of Maritime Canada, and the same ideas being shrunk down to the size of an individual struggling to construct identity in a post-modern city. The questions and the conclusions that were drawn from them were assisted, not limited, by the diversity of approaches used to tackle the subject. To return to Mitchell once again, 'space is a practiced place...an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place.'²⁴ This reading of space does not necessarily have to be a literal or a literary reading but more a consideration or an understanding of the particularities alongside the universal qualities alive within the space. All papers presented at this workshop are united by this aim, despite differing contexts and approaches.

Reflected in these papers are considerations of both landscape and the body and how social location rather than spatial location within cities can be a powerful tool for the construction of identity. This relies on thinking in terms of the historicity of seeing, of walking, of how space, place and landscape combine to result in acts of imaginative reconstruction. This imaginative reconstruction can be seen in terms of 'reading' spaces, a term coined by William West,²⁵ and an idea that is formally approached in these papers and within space studies in general. 'Reading' space is not a literary activity but a

²⁴ Mitchell, 'Preface to *Landscape and Power*', p. viii.

²⁵ William N. West, 'Reading Rooms: Architecture and Agency in the Houses of Michel de Montaigne and Nicholas Bacon' [Spring 2004] http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3612/is_200404/ai_n9374581/pg_1

theoretical approach to understanding the space, place or landscape under consideration. Once a space has been ‘read’ it results in a more complete conceptualisation and deeper understanding of its abstract qualities. Research from a variety of schools manages to read spaces independently, as these combined papers have shown; the amalgamation of different readings creates a collaborative approach to seeing the intricacies of space, not just looking at them. This collective effort takes us further from the dialectic understanding of space and into a realm that is closer to the continuity of Mitchell’s three concepts. We see, for example in the case of Commonwealth London how a symbolic landscape reflected modern optimism and new ways of re-imagining imperial power. Such ideas were also worked through in the case of archaeological Crete, where performative space is inferred by arrangements of material remains. These remains are used to reconstruct performance and movement through space. Performance and practice can be used to illuminate the theories of space, place and landscape by providing enlivened and mobile apparatus to spatial analysis. We see in this set of papers how inappropriate it is to limit analysis to boundaries drawn on maps or constructed time periods – space is fluid, a realisation that adheres to Mitchell’s experimentations with trialectics and continuity between the space, place and landscape.

When removed from the scale of the individual the concepts of scale and temporality become necessary factors when examining the application of space, place and landscape theory. It is worth flagging up here the way that the concept of regionalism, often thought of as a weak and subordinate method of understanding space, has been deployed in these papers as a means of remedying anonymity and modernity via links to both the global and the local. Emphasizing once again the ability to read space, place and landscape through a range of sources and materials: literarily, materially, imaginatively. Just as this introduction has made reference to the interwoven qualities of space, place and landscape these papers have demonstrated that viewing these terms through an equally blurred viewpoint that encompasses literary, historical and cultural context can stir up new and engaging interpretations of space. The solid body of research and theory from De Certeau to David Harvey brought together the different schools that presented papers at the workshop. The application of this research by disparate research communities created a collection of work on spatial studies at the University of

Nottingham; a collection that capitalized on previous work done in reading groups and research communities across the University. The aim to consider the trialectics of space is a trajectory that unites through the desire to read spaces, whether the space is historical, monumental, political, regional, and geographical or a literary realisation of any of these forms. The workshop tackled a multitude of concerns that arise from a consideration of space, place and landscape. Previous studies of these concepts deal with the problem of reduction; giving separate and opposing definitions to each of these areas narrows the possibility for continuation between the three. Conversely, the opposing approach that uses these terms synonymously has an equal effect of reduction. Similarly, the positioning of each term in relation to a particular school of thought is equally reductive; seeing landscape as associated with art and art history, place with geography and space with philosophy and theory increases the possibility of separation. Considering each term from a variety of angles and approaches, whilst not falling into the trap of using them synonymously, resulted in the papers presented at the workshop, and the discussions that followed, being linked by intricate details and specifics of locations and buildings. A reading of these papers will show that they are somehow joined by the trialectic conception of space, place and landscape, despite the very different application and approaches to both literature and geography. A diverse and complex theoretical discussion arose due to the association of space, place and landscape in all papers presented.

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