

With reference to specific examples, discuss the importance of understanding landscapes as 'a way of seeing' in cultural geography

Landscape can be thought of as both something seen and a particular 'way of seeing' the world - both the land and the gaze upon it. Throughout the 1980's, conceptions of landscape would converge upon the latter, the gaze. Indeed, the decade was typified by a logic that landscape was 'the history of a way of seeing, or better, of representing.' (Wylie, 2007) Under the representational school, landscape was firmly embedded in the Western dualities of a masculinist subject-object, observer-observed dialectic. This landscape 'way of seeing' was historically manifest in the capitalist and proprietorial agendas and 'visual ideologies' of antiquity. In recent years however the hegemony of such 'spectatorial epistemology' - the presupposition of the world as an external pre-given reality, observable by its aloof human spectator - has become diluted.

Under the phenomenological school of recency, landscape, rather than being a socially constructed and distinct subject-object 'way of seeing', is a more an embodied 'way of being', an immersive and experiential dwelling in which the potentialities of the body and its agency are realisable. These landscapes - of the vernacular, Antarctica, the Victorian garden and the Jura mountains descended at sunset - suggest that the 'way of seeing', in the representational and ideological sense, is waning. This paper situates in the space between both schools, arguing that whilst the relative importance of landscape as 'a way of seeing' in cultural geography does indeed vacillate - contingent upon the empirical and academic contexts and rigours with which it was probed - the absolute importance of it, as a mode of visibility, remains. I suggest, through specific reference to Scott and Amundsen's Antarctica (Wylie, 2002b), that both the phenomenological 'ways of being' and representational 'ways of seeing' operate simultaneously on the human body and its conscience. The landscape as such emerges still embedded in 'a way of seeing', that particular gaze, but now as 'both a performative sensorium and site and source of cultural meaning and symbolism.'

The cultural marxist critique of landscape art posits that it serves an ideological function through its symbolic reproduction and refinement of the 'single gaze'. As Thomas writes: 'the landscape way of seeing [establishes] a fixed relationship between object and subject, locating the viewer outside of the picture and outside of the relations being depicted.' (Wylie, 2007 p68) This latter observation is historically significant, for this distancing between self and image facilitated the manipulation and deception by a bourgeoisie elite of socio-economic relations within the landscape. The realist tradition of Western painting, as Cosgrove suggests, functioned 'dupliciously' by on the one hand offering 'a redemptive, transcendent and aesthetic vision of sensual unity with nature' whilst on the other operating as 'a smokescreen concealing the underlying truth of material conditions' (Cosgrove, 1985).

In the 'picturesque', 19th Century British landscape art, this duplicity materialised within scenes of the rural idyll; of distant labourers at work tilling the land or tending the herd within a stable, unified, egalitarian society. Yet as Barrell posits, such a scene of 'labourers at work' is ideologically charged in that it succinctly fulfills 'both the morally prescriptive [and Georgic] desire to condemn idleness, and, at the same time, seeks to naturalise the workers through identifying them with supposedly 'timeless' rural activities.' (Barrell, 1980 p. 5) This portrayal of the poor as content 'swains of Arcadia' was thus enmeshed in a duplicitous facade, wherein the painting dually reveals the actuality of poverty, whilst also, and more effectively, concealing that very actuality.

In similar vein, Cosgrove evinces a duplicitous landscape, entwined within the Venetian elite of Renaissance Italy - the birthplace of linear perspective and the three-dimensional canvas that enabled the eye to behold an 'absolute mastery over space.' The Venetian school, by instilling an artificially luminous and classical vision of the city and the softly undulating Alps, served to disguise its organic inhabitants, those 'vulgar mezzardi and livelli' struggling in the streets to meet their rents. Such 'a way of seeing' is thus embedded within a particularly bourgeoisie gaze, complicit with the 'capitalist strategies of economic, social and sexual appropriation and control' precisely because it legitimated and naturalised the social exploitation inherent in the system. Wylie further posits that these landscape representations of patrician control are identifiable in modern society. Duncan & Duncan's semiotic account of American suburbia posits the existence of a pastoral landscape 'transplanted' from Europe. Bedford, a suburb north of New York City, is aesthetically modelled and prided by its privileged landowners, whom 'seeing' the landscape through the archetypal idyllic lens, are oblivious to the Latino sub-class of gardeners, painters and builders sustaining their very romanticism; alike the peasant of antiquity, their economic functionality is rendered faceless and thus emotionless.

As Williams declares, 'a working country is hardly ever a landscape.' Jackson further suggests the post-war American government, wedded to notions of 'inappropriate, aesthetic form inherited from the old-world picturesque landscapes of Europe', rendered the contemporary American scene invisible, stifling the vernacular. The vernacular of the British countryside is also stifled, Edensor suggests that the seemingly innocent activity of walking is 'beset by conventions about what constitutes appropriate bodily conduct' (Edensor 2000, 83), and that the zoning-off of various territories as landscapes of natural, national and nostalgic significance express a strictly gendered and racialised process of excluding and including. Landscape as a 'way of seeing' thus continues to engender a sense of the disembodied and externalised; of a 'world-as-exhibition' as opposed to the 'world-as-dwelt' gaze.

The landscape way of seeing, as Rose argues, is a particularly masculine visual gaze, embedded within the dualities of female/male and nature/culture. Berger furthers this dominant regime as one of white, heterosexual masculinism wherein 'women appear' but 'men act'. The landscape as female is imbued with a sense of non-phallic Otherness, indeed as Mulvey writes, 'the representation of the female form in a symbolic order...speaks castration and nothing else.' This Otherness is imbricated in the logic of the disembodied, colonial gaze. Stoddart, writing of his voyage in Tahiti, holds the exotic landscape in visual affinity with the feminine Other, his gaze blighted by the 'terrifying posture' of the land, its 'maternal swamps... inhabited by sphinxes and gorgons.' In similar vein, terrors of the unknown in North America and Africa were graphically visualised as a maternal suffocation and the interwar German Freikorps feared for the homeland, plagued by horrors of deluge, engulfment and dissolution into the mother. (Rose, 1993 p.106) Yet, whilst these fears motivated and necessitated the voyeuristic, distanced gaze of the masculine subject upon his object, it too lured him to a narcissistic identification with the pre-Oedipal, phallic other; to the sirens of the unknown and penetrable. As Rose elicits, 'implicit in the metaphor of land-as-woman was both the regressive pull of maternal containment and the seductive invitation to sexual assertion' (Rose, 1993 p. 105) These interactions of voyeurism and narcissism thus structured the landscape 'way of seeing' and rendered it unstable, strung between the conflicting impulses of voyeuristic distance and narcissistic identification and identification.

This masculine tension thus facilitated an imperial gaze, a 'way of seeing' manifest in a disembodied and systematic structuralism, as Pratt premises, the 'detached, controlling, imperial gaze [leeches] the life out of the scene surveyed' replacing it with 'a fabricated set of Eurocentric conceptions or a tabula rasa, an emptiness, blank but measurable' (Pratt, 1992 p.7) The transposition of European landscapes, values and beliefs onto the non-European space facilitated the familiarisation of the exotic other and the legitimisation of exploitation through a depiction of the idyll. Nash illuminates the colonial landscape of the West Indies, as perceived through this masculine gaze, as diffuse in palm trees and contented natives tilling the distant, ripe and Edenic lands. (Nash, 2008 p.161) In essence, the bourgeoisie landscape 'way of seeing' painted the colonial situation in soft light, 'lifting it out of historical actuality into an aestheticised realm of abundance, innocence and harmony' (Wylie, 2000 p.132) Thus landscape, as a European, masculine and hegemonic 'way of seeing' subdued strangeness, through its symbolic erasure of local history prescribing the deadening anaesthetic to the native potentialities of resistance and rebellion.

The phenomenological 'way of seeing' precipitated as anathema and corollary, to this disembodied masculine gaze. As Thrift posits, rather than representation and the 'self-contained individual confronting a world out there', phenomenology embraces 'a being-in-the-world', a dwelling. Thus landscape as a 'way of seeing' is anchored in a human, embodied perception, one antithetical to its detached masculine

predecessor. The evolution from representation to phenomenology was however, not strictly linear, indeed within the historical masculinist gaze there were potentialities for resistance and embodied 'ways of seeing.' The 'vernacular landscape' of the US south-west - the dusty highways, scrublands and trailer parks - eschewed the disembodied, masculine gaze; a landscape people 'inhabited and worked in', moulded by a perpetual coalescence of soil and dirt with their bodies of sweat and hardship. (Jackson, 1997, p343) Such a vernacular within Victorian England was present in the small, cultivated garden. Rose suggests 'that both in its design and in the small-scale pleasures that it afforded, the garden constituted one form of a non-phallogocentric look' The garden as such emerges as 'feminine resistance' to hegemonic ways of seeing dissolving 'the illusion of an unmarked, unitary, distanced, masculine spectator.' (Rose, 1993 p.112)

Evolving from these vernaculars, Berger writes of the landscape art of Courbet as resistant and 'inimical to its [contemporary] bourgeois versions of materialism.' Painting on dark ground the dense forests, steep slopes and waterfalls of the Jura mountains, Courbet evoked 'no hierarchy of appearance' or visual ideology, rather something 'irreducibly real' - the snow, flesh, hair, fur, clothes, bark. Berger concludes, 'ideology partly determines the finished result but it does not determine the energy flowing through the current...it is with this [embodied] energy that the spectator identifies.' (Agnew, 2000 p.335) This elision of ideology and 'energy', of the disembodied 'way of seeing' and the embodied is further suggested by Price, a Welshman descending a valley by dusk. At the summit the representational, masculine gaze predominates; his 'sense of mastery' over the town below fermenting commensurate to 'the sexual content assumed to exist in dreams of the child as being able to fly.' Yet as he descends through the shards of dusk light towards the village 'the shapes fade and the ordinary identities return...like old Bailey asking, digging his stick in the turf, 'What will you be reading Will?' This dialectic, of dwelling and detachment, familiarity and strangeness, summit and base proposes that in actuality, both representational and phenomenological 'ways of seeing' are intimately entwined.

Scott and Amundsen's journeys to the South Pole between 1910 and 1912 illuminate this intimate relation between the disembodied and the embodied gaze. Wylie writes of the landscape as 'a concrete and sensuous concatenation of material forces' through which the British and Norwegian polar parties defined themselves; that their bodily comportments and competencies, rather than being mere reliefs upon a sublime background were instead implicated in the environmental intimacies of 'becoming icy.' He writes, 'frozen feet and hands are placed upon the warm chests of consenting companions in a series of awkward embraces, unlikely arrangements of bodily parts. Antarctica demands, above all, that the frontiers of one's body be rigorously established and maintained' (Wylie, 2002b) Similarly the masculine gaze, as with the bodily functions is corporeal, haptic. Yet the realisation of this corporeality is what differentiated the two parties, simultaneously felling Scott and erecting Amundsen, for as Wylie writes, Scott's 'way of seeing'

rested upon representation, a 'quest for mastery based upon detachment', whilst Amundsen's was phenomenological, one expressive of affinity and embodiment.

The difference was enshrined in their positioning of base camp. Scott placed his in 'terra ferma, on a cape of Ross Island at the Barrier's western edge', a landscape framed with familiarity and solidity, Amundsen however sited his 'upon the Barrier itself' a space wherein there was 'no perspective for the eye to seize and gauge the scene...only ice, in a seemingly limitless sweep southward.' Yet this lack of perspective, a seemingly blinkered and foreign 'way of seeing' was, in actuality, what enabled Amundsen to reach the Pole, his gaze as such was one commensurate with dwelling, a 'becoming icy' amidst the greyish white haze of the chimeric horizon and the 'surface dusted with millions of infinitesimal mirrors and prisms'. Wylie's account is what he terms, a post-phenomenological one; one in which the constructivist, realist and phenomenological ways of seeing converge and coalesce. The potentialities for this coexistence thus reify the absolute importance of landscape as a 'way of seeing.'

Landscape, as a culturally conditioned habit of visual perception, has become increasingly contentious within cultural geography over the last three decades. The evolution from a disembodied 'way of seeing' - one embedded in the Western dualities of a masculine subject-object, observer-observed dialectic - to a more embodied one suggests landscape, in the representational and cultural sense, has diminished along with its imperial and bourgeoisie curators. This paper however has argued that the rise of phenomenological 'ways of seeing' does not signify the death of the representational. Rather, both were and continue to coalesce and converge with one another, a facet rendered succinctly by one of landscape art's pioneering souls, Cezanne: 'the landscape thinks itself in me...and I am its consciousness.' Thus whilst the traditional, masculine 'way of seeing' and reproducing culture lives on; manifest in modern images, symbols and art, so too does the embodied 'way of seeing.' Landscape as such is 'both a performative sensorium and site and source of cultural meaning and symbolism.' The importance of landscape as a 'way of seeing' thus remains paramount within modern culture.

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