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Introduction: on ideology and landscape

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People, period and place

Napoleon stood five feet six and a half inches in his stockinged feet: about average height for a Frenchman for his day ... The most distinctive feature of his body was the broad chest, covering lungs of exceptional capacity ... Napoleon's shoulders were broad, and his limbs well-made. But they were not particularly muscular. His thighs, for instance, lacked grip. He sat his horse like a sack of potatoes, had to lean well forward to keep his balance and in the hunting field was often thrown. His was an energetic but not a powerful physique ... Napoleon had a head of average size; he took, in today's measurements, a number 7 hat. The head seemed large because his neck was short. His feet were small: twenty-six centimetres long, that is size 6. His hands were small and beautifully made, with tapering fingers and well-formed nails. Small too were the penis and testicles ... Napoleon used to say that his heart-beat was less audible and less pronounced than most men's, but his doctors could find no evidence of this. His pulse rate ranged between fifty-four and sixty beats a minute. So the rhythm of metabolism appears to have been average. No physical peculiarity can explain the speed at which his mind worked.[1]

In Vincent Cronin's biography of Napoleon, which runs to some 470 pages, only these sentences and a few others describe Napoleon's physique: Cronin's concern is much more with Napoleon's attitudes and actions than with his appearance, even though it contributed significantly to public perception of his personality and even though the image of Napoleon became familiar through drawings and prints to many ordinary people not only in France but throughout Europe. A biographer seeks not so much to describe the appearance of a person as to understand a whole personality and to situate that individual within a society. A graphic pen-and-ink sketch of Paul Vidal de la Blache's countenance drawn five years before he died undoubtedly enlivens T. W. Freeman's biographical essay[2] and enables us to connect vicariously with the founding-father of the French school of regional geography, but it is Vidal de la Blache's ideas – their origins, evolution and impact – and not his physiognomy which retain our

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attention. Those ideas cannot be taken at face value but have to be evaluated critically within the context of social practice and social thought in France during the nineteenth century, for Vidal de la Blache was working in a period of political and intellectual turmoil which both influenced his own thinking and was itself influenced by it.[3]

People may, in this regard, be taken as a metaphor for place: a sketch of a landscape may capture or caricature its essence but it cannot be expected to reveal very much about its whole, complex, character.[4] Even the appearance of a place is not easily to be described[5] but a landscape also needs to be situated within its own natural and cultural history – its own ancestry and upbringing – if it is to be properly understood. Places have been perceived as people: Vidal de la Blache recognized that a region has a 'geographical personality'; Fernand Braudel that a country has an 'identity'; and Marvyn Samuels that a landscape has a 'biography'.[6] A place (like a person) needs to be recognized in terms not only of individuality but also of contextuality, as a product both of nature and of nurture. A landscape is a social construction, both intentionally and unintentionally. Landscape is not only, as Dennis Cosgrove has described it, 'a way of seeing';[7] it is also 'a way of thinking and a way of doing' which involves what David Harvey terms a process of 'creative destruction'.[8] The explicit 'idea of landscape' might only date from the Renaissance but both what have come subsequently to be termed 'landscapes' and also ideas about landscapes existed centuries earlier. The 'idea of landscape' has a more restricted historical and geographical currency than does 'the landscape of ideas'.

Mainly on ideology

A landscape is a resultant of attitudes and actions; but to the extent that actions are themselves outcomes of attitudes the latter deserve – but have by no means always been granted – a privileged status over the former in historico-geographical studies.[9] The process of landscape creation and reformation was captured tangentially in Marx's view of history as being specific to particular places: at every period of history there is 'a material outcome . . . a historically created relationship to nature and of individuals towards each other', a sum total of production forces 'that is transmitted to each generation by its predecessor' and 'on the one hand is modified by the new generation but on the other itself prescribes its own living conditions and imposes upon it a definite development, a special character of its own – so that, in other words, circumstances make men just as men make circumstances'.[10] Historical specificity can thus be envisaged as underpinning the individuality of a landscape. Such an approach to landscape change allows for, indeed requires, consideration both of intended and unintended consequences of actions, and of material and non-material motivations. It

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recognizes the possibility of a false consciousness on the part of people who have enacted historical roles assigned to them by forces which they did not understand and which can only be comprehended by an observer, while it also allocates a role to ideology as a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it. Marx insisted that:

> a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of the natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical – in short ideological – forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so we cannot judge such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production.[11]

Historical studies of landscapes must be grounded in an analysis of material structures: they are properly concerned with tangible, visible expressions of different modes of production, with hedgerows and field systems, with canals and factory systems. But such material structures are created and creatively destroyed within an ideological context: such studies must therefore also acknowledge that landscapes are shaped by mental attitudes and that a proper understanding of landscapes must rest upon the historical recovery of ideologies.

'Ideology' is an imprecise term, a concept which has acquired a number of different meanings and, as Georges Duby has pointed out, the negative, pejorative connotations which it has developed in a political context have obscured its utility for the purposes of historical analysis which will be best served by the acceptance of the widest of definitions.[12] The two conventional uses of 'ideology', as distinguished by J. B. Thompson, are as 'the lattice of ideas which permeate the social order, constituting the collective consciousness of each epoch' and as 'a consciousness which is in some way "false" and which fails to grasp the real conditions of human existence': Derek Gregory conveniently refers to these respectively as a 'generalized' and as a 'distorted' system of ideas.[13] But Thompson, dissatisfied with the first definition because it is too wide and with the second because it is too narrow, argues for ideology as 'a system of signification which facilitates the pursuit of particular interests' and sustains specific 'relations of domination'.[14] As Gregory has emphasized, this formulation draws critically upon both A. Giddens' structuration theory and J. Habernas' version of critical theory.[15] Giddens has suggested, for example, that 'to analyse the ideological aspects of symbolic orders' is 'to examine how structures of signification are mobilised to legitimate the sectional interests of hegemonic groups'.[16] Duby, as a social historian, adopted Althusser's definition of ideology as 'a system (possessing its own logic and structure) of

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representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts) existing and playing a historical role within a given society'.[17] Ideology, then, involves systems and structures of signification and domination: any landscape is likely to contain all manner of ideological representations so that a description of its appearance must also logically be 'thickened'[18] into an interpretation of its meaning.

Of the many characteristics of ideology, just three will be addressed here because of their especial relevance to landscape creation and so to landscape interpretation: the connections of an ideology to a quest for *order*, to an assertion of *authority*, and to a project of *totalisation*.[19] An ideology is seen by Edward Shils as 'the product of man's need for imposing intellectual order on the world. The need for an ideology is an intensification of the need for a cognitive and moral map of the universe.'[20] Ideologies offer ordered, simplified visions of the world; they substitute a single certainty for a multiplicity of ambiguities; they tender to individuals both an ordered view of the world and of their own place within its natural and social systems. The function of an ideology in this regard is to furnish assurance; it does so, paradoxically, either by highlighting perfect patterns in the present or by promising utopian forms in the future. In both cases, the concept of order comes to be represented in landscapes, both unintentionally and intentionally. In the case of cities, for example, Yi-Fu Tuan has emphasized that:

> The city is a place, a centre of meaning, par excellence. It has many visible symbols. More important, the city itself is a symbol. The traditional city symbolized, first, transcendental and man-made order as against the chaotic forces of terrestrial and infernal nature. Second, it stood for an ideal human community ... It was as a transcendental order that ancient cities acquired their monumental aspect. Massive walls and portals demarcated sacred space. Fortifications defended a people against not only human enemies but also demons and the souls of the dead. In medieval Europe priests consecrated city walls so that they could ward off the devil, sickness, and death – in other words, the threats of chaos.[21]

More particularly, Paul Wheatley has shown how the ordered spatial structure of the ancient Chinese city 'afforded a ritual paradigm of the ordering of social interaction at the same time as it disseminated the values and inculcated the attitudes necessary to sustain it'[22] and Dennis Cosgrove has demonstrated how the Italian Renaissance ideal city, with its geometrically ordered proportions and its monumental buildings, expressed and communicated not only the symbolic order of humanism but also the symbolic authority of the Italian nobility.[23]

Ideologies involve the assertion of authority, transcendental or earthly. Consequently, they are concerned with struggles for power between conflicting interest groups. Ideologies compete with each other, so a given society and landscape may have several different systems of symbolic

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representations existing within it simultaneously and antagonistically. Ideologies are inevitably political (but not necessarily, of course, party political) and some of the most intense power struggles have been between proponents of allegedly transcendental ideologies. Conversely, even an earthly ideology concerns itself with the sacred because it reaches out to sanctify an entire life-world by bringing every part within its compass: hence the emphasis on the sacred and the profane, light and dark, inside and outside, 'us' and 'them' in any ideology, whether nominally religious or anti-religious, and the avowed importance of converting the latter into the former in each case. Whether authority (as identified by Max Weber) has its locus in tradition and custom, in reason and knowledge, or in the claims of a charismatic leader,[24] the exercise of power is expressed forcefully in language and in a wide range of written texts whose function it is to defend and to propagate the particular system of ideas and values upon which a given ideology is based.

Reconstructing ideologies thus involves identifying, linking and interpreting a mass of archival, documentary sources, ranging from legal codes to personal correspondence. But ideologies exert their authority and find expression not only in language but also in landscape. Non-verbal 'documents' in the landscape can be powerful visual signs, conveying messages forcefully, and their importance is enhanced when we are dealing with historical but (often) predominantly illiterate societies. An historical landscape was, for example, rich in signs of identity, linking an individual with a social group: coats of arms, flags, totems, uniforms, decorations, tattooings, hairstyles, trademarks. It was also replete with expressions of social codes – protocols, rituals, fashions and games – which were elements of communication: gestures and dances, customs and ceremonies, parades and processions, eating and drinking, all provided opportunity for a social message to be communicated, for authority to be asserted, for prestige and power to be proclaimed. This argument is without closure because 'everything is a sign: presents, our houses, our furniture, our domestic animals'.[25] Ideologies create, unintentionally as well as deliberately, a landscape as a system of signification, expressive of authority.

An ideology employs individual, sacred, symbols to signify its own holistic character. Ideologies are, as Duby puts it, 'complete systems, fulfilling, by nature, a *globalising* function; they also claim to offer an overall representation of a society, its past, present and future, integrated into a complete *Weltanschaung*'.[26] Shils argues that an 'ideology contends for the realization of a state of affairs which, its proponents allege, either never existed previously or existed in the past but exists no longer' and that 'ideologies impel their proponents to insist on the realization of the ideal, which is contained in the sacred, through a "total transformation" of society'.[27] Within that 'globalising function' and 'total transformation'

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landscapes were both products and process, structured and structuring. One way in which an ideology seeks to achieve its hegemony is through total conquest, be it of the physical and/or the human environment; another way is through total withdrawal, so that the ideology's essence can be isolated from the polluting influences of its existing environment. Either way, the reorganization of a landscape signifies a realignment of authority.

Ideological impulses are constantly modifying landscapes. Ideologies, moreover, contain within themselves a contradiction: they seek permanence and continuity but argue for change, for the realisation of fundamental principles through praxis. Ideologies perform a stabilizing role while perfecting transformation; they are simultaneously loaded with inertia and pregnant with change. Some ideologies use systems of representation to protect the privileges of an established authority; others use them to promote new power relations. But 'the ideal social organisation to which the most revolutionary ideologies aspire is still perceived, beyond the battles fought and won in the cause, as the establishment of something permanent; no utopia preaches permanent revolution'.[28] Both the conflicts engaged in explicitly by ideologies and their own internal contradictions are enmeshed in the constant, but not continuous, process of landscape change.

Mainly on landscape

The description and interpretation of landscapes has been a long and honourable tradition within geography: along with the locational school and the ecological school, it stands as one of the main 'deviations' from geography's central concern with regions, places and areas. Like the term 'ideology', that of 'landscape' has been given a number of different – and debated – definitions: it has been most usually employed to refer to the impression conveyed by an area, to the objects producing that impression, and to the area itself.[29] But the character of the landscape school of geography has itself been redefined – and debated – in recent years as part of the humanistic renaissance of modern geography.[30]

The practice (but not the contention) of geography as the study of the transformation of 'natural landscapes' into 'cultural landscapes', of 'changing landscapes', owes much to the research and writings of Carl Sauer and the Berkeley school of cultural geography, to Clifford Darby and the British school of historical geography, and to the writings of Roger Dion in France.[31] Each of those influences was, of course, constructed upon foundations laid by earlier scholars and each derived some of its strengths from liaisons with cognate disciplines, especially archaeology, anthropology and history (particularly economic history). Moreover, their impact has been magnified in association with a concern for landscape

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history by non-geographers like J. B. Jackson in North America, W. G. Hoskins in Britain and Fernand Braudel in France.[32] Furthermore, the lineage of such studies descends through to the present day in works such as Michael Conzen's *The making of the American landscape*, R. A. Dodgshon and R. A. Butlin's *An historical geography of England and Wales* and Jean-Robert Pitte's *Histoire du paysage français*.[33] These three works are unambiguously 'children' of the founding-fathers of landscape geography, but they have certainly matured and acquired a sturdy independence from them, exhibiting a remarkable diversity of approaches to the study of landscape.

That there are at least 'ten versions of the same scene' has been elucidated by Donald Meinig who argues that different observers of the 'same' prospect might see the landscape before them, depending upon their 'perspectives', as representing *nature* (emphasizing the insignificance of people), *habitat* (as people's adjustment to nature), *artefact* (reflecting people's impact on nature), *system* (a scientific view of interacting processes), *problem* (for solving through social action), *wealth* (in terms of property), *ideology* (revealing cultural values and social philosophy), *history* (as a record of the concrete and the chronological), *place* (through the identity that locations have), and *aesthetic* (according to some artistic quality possessed).[34] More succinctly, Conzen has codified landscape studies into four principal approaches, reflecting respectively concerns with *environmental awareness*, with *symbolic representation*, with *landscape design*, and with *landscape history*.[35] In practice, as Conzen admits, these four approaches collapse into one because:

> to view the landscape historically is to acknowledge its cumulative character; to acknowledge that nature, symbolism, and design are not static elements of the human record but change with historical experience; and to acknowledge too that the geographically distinct quality of places is a product of the selective addition and survival over time of each new set of forms peculiar to that region or locality.[36]

Studies of landscape, like those of ideologies, necessitate an historical perspective. Because landscapes have histories they possess a compelling human significance.

'Actual' landscapes are constructions, 'ideal' landscapes are conceptualizations. At the same time, 'actual' landscapes are moulded by ideologies and ideologies are themselves fashioned by 'actual' landscapes: the relationship is reciprocal, the product is a dialectical landscape which is a resolution of nature and culture, of practice and philosophy, of reason and imagination, of 'real' and 'symbolic'. This 'way of seeing' landscapes was not the one adopted by most traditional cultural and historical geographers who focussed their attentions upon landscape expressions of material culture and tended to ignore, or at least to neglect, the *mentalité* of the

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people who created them. Cultural landscape forms were seen in materialist terms, interpreted straightforwardly as products of work, as people laboured to meet their basic needs for food, water, clothing and shelter and transformed landscapes in so doing – clearing woodland, draining marshland, reclaiming heathland, building farmsteads, erecting barns, constructing railways and so on. This approach to landscape, fundamentally utilitarian and economistic, was grounded in a weak conceptualization of culture which separated off economy from consciousness, action from ideology. Alternatively, we can agree with Sahlins that economy should be regarded as 'a category of culture rather than behaviour, in a class with politics or religion rather than rationality or prudence; not the need-serving activities of individuals, but the material process of society'.[37] Landscapes are indeed products of, *inter alia*, the struggle for survival and the need to 'make a living' but that activity is engaged in by conscious human beings. As Cosgrove – drawing in part upon Vidalian reserves – has aptly put it: 'Any mode of production is a "mode of life", a *genre de vie*, constituted by men [*sic*] and symbolic *ab initio*.'[38] Landscapes of material are also landscapes of meaning: praxis is itself symbolic, all landscapes are symbolic in practice.

A shift away from narrowly materialistic interpretations of landscapes to a broader concern with the meaning of landscapes has not, however, necessarily meant a drift towards idealist interpretations,[39] because material needs and constraints remain as integral components of culture and of landscape. Such a move has already enriched studies of even 'ordinary' landscapes[40] and is increasingly infusing broader syntheses. For example, the essays edited by Conzen on the making of the American landscape are explicitly 'rooted' in the fertile traditions of landscape study and some deal with familiar themes like 'the clearing of the forests' and 'the settlement of the American grassland', but most of the essays bring forth newer fruits like 'French landscapes in North America', 'democratic utopian landscapes', 'landscapes of private power and wealth' and the construction of a 'national landscape'.[41]

The discovery of meaning in landscapes is a challenging but difficult task, both in theory and in practice.[42] Perhaps for that reason it has been described using a great variety of metaphors most of which serve to emphasize the duality of the 'apparent' and the 'hidden' in landscapes: 'surface/depth' figures-of-speech abound. Pitte's likening of a landscape to the *visible tip of an iceberg*[43] was echoed in the use of Lawren Stewart Harris' oil painting *Icebergs, Davis Strait* by Cosgrove and Daniels to illustrate the dust-jacket of their edited collection of essays on the iconography of land[*sic*]scape.[44] Mixing his metaphor, Pitte also likened landscape to a *snapshot* (*pellicule*) of geographical reality[45] (which in turn recalls to mind Marc Bloch's description of the retrogressive method in

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history as like unwinding a spool of film to reveal earlier and earlier frames).[46] For Pitte, a landscape is also 'an act of liberty: it is a *poem* written on a blank sheet of climax vegetation'.[47] For Audrey Kobayashi, landscape is like a *dance* because it, too, is

> a process totalized, the extension and collection of human activity in a material setting. It is organized, choreographed, although seldom so expressively as in the dance; like the dance, it can produce profound emotional effects on the beholder whose senses are awakened to its presentation. Both landscape and the dancer require a practised eye to appreciate their finer qualities. Both are irreducible to their constituent elements, both transcend their moments of expression, yet neither exceeds its physical features: buildings or props, movements, expressions in flux.[48]

Others view landscape as *theatre*, or as *carnival* or as *spectacle*.[49] Alternatively for Kobayashi landscape is 'a form of *language*, and it is necessary to know its history, its structures and its syntax if it is to be understood'.[50] Many other interpreters of landscapes have employed *geological* metaphors, referring to the 'sedimentation' of meaning in landscapes, to 'layers' and 'strata', and to 'underlying structures' of meaning. More frequently, however, landscape is being likened to a *written document* to be read critically as a 'deeply-layered text'.[51] Like texts, landscapes are being opened to Derrida's strategy of deconstruction and, to borrow J. B. Harley's phrase, 'searched for alternative meanings'.[52] To deconstruct (a text or a landscape) is, in Terry Eagleton's alternative metaphor, 'to reverse the imposing tapestry in order to expose it in all its unglamorously dishevelled tangle the threads constituting the well-heeled image it presents to the world'.[53] Easily stated but difficult to accomplish because the landscape, as Roland Barthes has emphasized, is the richest of our system of signs.[54] A common metaphor currently in use in landscape studies is that of a landscape as a *message which has to be decoded*. But while a landscape is composed of a multiplicity of signs it may also contain a plurality of meanings: it is not a simple matter of 'one landscape/one message'. So, to the important tasks of reconstructing 'actual' landscapes of the past and tracking their changes through time has to be added that of deciphering their signs, of discovering their meanings.

Considerable movement towards a redefinition of landscape and towards a theory of cultural landscape change has been made by Cosgrove, in a series of studies initiated some years ago in his paper on 'place, landscape and the dialectics of cultural geography'[55] and by Kobayashi in her recent 'critique of dialectical landscape' which – as its title signals – draws heavily but critically upon some of the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre.[56] There has been a palpable shift in landscape studies in recent years. Nonetheless, continuities can also be detected running from Vidal de la Blache's concern with the concept of *pays* through the ideas of structura-

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lism to those of deconstruction.[57] For example, Kobayashi's argument that 'the geographical theory of landscape can provide the third component in a triad of action, discourse and object, for a comprehensive, dialectical understanding of social history'[58] provides clearly audible echoes of concepts enunciated deep within the salons of the French geographic tradition.[59] This is hardly surprising because, as Cosgrove has remarked 'the issues raised by landscape and its meanings point to the heart of social and historical theory: issues of individual and collective action, of objective and subjective knowing, of idealist and materialist explanation'.[60] Such issues are fundamental to a humanistic geography, indeed to any humanistic study, and together with the holistic character of landscape, explain why the geographical study of landscape must involve many disciplines in addition to geography.

Place, period and people

Such excursions into the territories of 'theory' have, of course, their own intrinsic interest and value but they are also and ultimately intended to enable us to comprehend more meaningfully landscapes of 'reality'. Better equipped conceptually, we can set to work more effectively in the field, in the record office and in the library. If only it were that simple. In practice, the task of understanding places in their appropriate historical and cultural contexts remains a daunting one because landscape as ideology can take as many forms as people are able to imagine and to create ways of establishing order and authority. The variability of landscape is understandable; landscapes themselves are less easily understood. An intellectual 'high priest' can impose his authority and distinguish between landscapes of dominant cultures and alternative landscapes of residual (relict) features, of emergent cultures and of excluded cultures but such a classification cannot – indeed, does not in this (Cosgrove's) case – claim to be inclusive or of objective validity.[61]

No such order is imposed upon the chapters in this volume. Each author addresses a specific problem but collectively the chapters can be seen to be principally concerned with ideologies of religion and of politics, with ideologies of church and of state. Major ideological changes during the last two thousand years – like the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the secularisation of society, and the emergence of nation states (and dependent colonies) – had profound effects upon landscapes and some of them are touched upon in these chapters. Other important ideological concerns – those which allocate central roles to gender, or to class or to ethnicity and those which value highly a reverence for nature or for the past – are not addressed here. There was never an intention – either at the conference which initially attracted these contributors or in the minds of the editors

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