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Rethinking the Landscapes of the Peak District

Introduction

This special issue consists of six essays that collectively expand ways of accounting for the landscapes of England's first national park, the Peak District. In following the recent upsurge in more critical, experimental landscape studies, the papers here move further away from the post-structural and purely phenomenological discussions of landscape that have dominated research since the 1990s, drawing on recent work about materiality, sensation and affect, and non-human agencies.

Officially designated in 1951, the Peak District National Park covers nearly 1,500 square kilometres of Derbyshire, Staffordshire, and Cheshire, and is typically divided into the White Peak, Dark Peak and South West Peak. The White Peak's limestone valleys, hills and dales are used for dairy farming and are intersected by woodland and streams. The southern stretch of the Dark Peak, primarily constituted by the Pennine hills, with several flooded valleys containing reservoirs, is replete with stone outcrops, upland heath and bogs. The South West Peak, is made up of moorland and pasture. These divergences immediately indicate the variegated nature of the landscape. Crucially, the Peak District is surrounded by the large cities of Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Stoke-on-Trent and Derby, attracting many residents from these urban centres in search of increasingly diverse forms of leisure.

English National Parks were established, as underlined in the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949*, to fulfil twin imperatives: to preserve the 'natural beauty' of particularly esteemed rural landscapes and to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. These ideals persist, but have been supplemented by contemporary policies to protect areas of environmental diversity, foster sustainable economic development, strengthen local communities and advance tourism (Crouch et al, 2009). Given this symbolic and political importance, national parks are freighted with peculiarly intense debates that context the values, aesthetics and uses of landscape. As the most visited British national park, the Peak District is especially subject to a host of conflicts oriented around environmental values, industrial and economic interests, local concerns, recreational provision, tourist ventures and multiple leisure pursuits. Accordingly, the management of this landscape must take into account a multitude of tastes, values and desires.

Some critics of the administration of national parks argue that in preserving a mooted originary 'authenticity' and following particular aesthetic conventions, landscapes become frozen, regulated to conform to styles from particular historical periods, their dynamic evolution curtailed (Suckall, et al, 2009). Alternative values do, of course, persist, as Herrington (2016) details in discussing how landscapes are judged as

beautiful by farmers because they manifest an orderliness and tidiness that connotes productivity.

As far as the Peak District is concerned, the continuous contestations that focus on complex landscape values are exemplified in a paper that discusses the post-war construction of Ladybower Reservoir (Cosgrove, Roscoe and Rycroft, 1996). Conceived in the interwar years, the construction of the reservoir was celebrated as a progressive, technologically advanced, modernist engineering project that would provide clean drinking water for surrounding cities. The large project involved the drowning of the Derwent Valley and the planting the lakeside with dense coniferous forest, concealing rocky outcrops and ridges, and chiming with the afforested slopes of Scandinavia. This, it was contended, produced a suitably Alpine aesthetic that aligned with the area's associations with 'wildness'. Yet though preservationist groups were unhappy at the displacement of the 'natural' landscape, not to mention the submerging of a village, they succeeded in influencing the development of a 'preservationist' aesthetic, a rusticity embodied in the styles and materials of the water management buildings that complemented the scheme's 'engineering' aesthetic.

Such contested values have since been augmented by the aesthetic priorities of a plethora of interest groups. For instance, wider recognition of ecologically functional values have resulted in the designation of several abandoned mine sites as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Batty, 2005). Here, ancient lead deposits support important vegetation communities containing key *metallophyte* species (plants that are able to tolerate high quantities of heavy metals) and lichens, as well as invertebrates, and this flourishing is recognised by their inclusion in the Peak District Biodiversity Action Plan. In addition to securing biological wealth at these old industrial sites, the growing popularity of geotourism has promoted recognition of the geological qualities of quarries, lobbying to prevent their infill or reuse (Hose, 2012).

Perceived threats to esteemed parts of the Peak landscape has also resulted in particularly visible and sustained forms of contestation. A protest camp was installed from 1999 to 2009 in woodland adjacent to Stanton Moor, site of the Nine Ladies Stone Circle (see Edensor, this issue) in opposition to plans to extend quarrying to within a mere 200 yards of the ancient site. During the height of the protest, the camp had around 80 people living in 30 tree houses and mobile homes; it was abandoned with few traces once the Peak District National Park Authority revoked permission for quarrying to proceed. Nevertheless, for its duration, the camp offered an alternative vision of an inhabited landscape, with its eco-centric structures and improvisational aesthetics. With its tunnels, treehouses and walkways, allotments, creative interventions and play areas, the camp was a symbolic outpost that broadcast a social and material sign of opposition, a somewhat utopian, affectively charged 'convergence site' where

activists gathered to share skills, knowledge and experiment with alternative lifestyles and livelihoods (Frenzel et al, 2014).

Another alternative, future oriented conception of landscape is offered by the transition town movement that has made inroads into Hope Valley within the national park and to the towns of Glossop, Wirksworth, Matlock and Buxton just outside. Besides foregrounding landscape values of sustainability and biodiversity, Sarah Neal proclaims that the transition movement shows that the rural is moving away from marginality and becoming 'an animated and turbulent space characterised by conflict, argument and anxiety' (2013: 60). As notions of the rural penetrate the urban and vice versa, radical, counter-cultural spaces emerge in the rural landscape, replete with alternative economic, social and cultural practices, notably in forms of work, exchange, agricultural production and energy use (Halfacree, 2007). By challenging the desirability of agribusiness, corporate retail concerns, commercial quarrying and mining, as well as the normative values enshrined in National Park management, through their exemplary ecocentric practices, these activists highlight how power is imprinted in the regulation, use and meaning of rural landscapes.

Indeed, power remains inscribed in the ongoing shaping of the landscape through the (re)production of symbolic significations (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1989) but also in the perpetuation of dominant ideas about *who* belongs in landscapes, what pursuits are preferable and what dispositions should be adopted (McCabe and Stokoe, 2004). Kye Askins (2006) discusses how the rural remains a key signifier of Englishness, a tenacious cultural norm that is nevertheless apt to be disregarded by Britons of Asian, African and Caribbean background who visit the Peak District. The renowned working class trespassers on Kinder Scout performed walking as a practice focused on character-building, masculinist, physical challenge that could be sought in the 'wild' and 'rugged' expanses of the Dark Peak, disavowing the dominant middle class notion that landscape should be consumed in romantic, visual contemplation (Tebbutt, 2006). Such class-based orientations towards landscape persist, according to Suckall et al (2009), and distinctive modes of apprehending and conceiving Peak landscapes are also mobilized by blind walkers (Macpherson, 2016).

Though prevailing understandings of Peak landscapes revolve around impressions disseminated by tourists, artists and marketers, the landscape is most intimately and enduringly known by its inhabitants. Here, landscape may be elided with 'taskscape' (Ingold, 2000), a realm of everyday work, play and residence - for farmers and farmworkers, for instance (Riley and Harvey, 2007). Such everyday inhabitation is multi-sensory, grounded in an embodied knowledge of working, moving across and sensing landscape. This dwelling is not akin to a Heideggerian immutability, a simple reiterative process that reproduces 'traditional' forms of living, but shifts across time and space. And a focus on such inhabitation also calls forth recognition of others who also

intimately know the landscape through different serial engagements: the climbers, cavers, walkers, cyclists and runners for whom the national park is a *leisurescape*.

These embodied engagements highlight recent considerations of landscape as a realm that is not merely symbolically read but is somatically experienced and apprehended. John Wylie's (2006) contention that we see with landscape can be augmented by an appreciation of how we also smell, hear and feel with landscape. In this special issue, particular attention is directed to often underplayed sensory engagements: Julian Holloway explores how we hear the landscape, or through the practice of resounding might imagine the soundscape of the past; Tim Edensor discusses how we see with the light of the landscape, a light that solicits movement and lures attention; Jess Edwards compares the rather detached appreciation of Victorian show caves with the messier, immersive tactile encounter with the challenging materialities of water, mud and rocky debris that cavers undertake; Rosemary Shirley focuses on the affective and sensual affordances of the clay, fluorspar and botanical matter derived from the landscape that provide ingredients for well dressing; George Jaramillo draws attention to the carnal impressions generated by encounters with dead, poisonous, ruined and abject matter; and David Cooper investigates how contemporary poets write from a position in which sensory and cultural impressions are thoroughly entangled. Such somatic and affective engagements diverge from the 'disembodied view' characteristic of picturesque gazing, honouring how the Peak landscape has always accommodated physically vigorous and absorbed practices

It is crucial to acknowledge how these distinct embodied practices of visitors and inhabitants, their values, and the spaces through which they move shape apprehension: driving, walking and cycling foster different bodily sensations, ways of looking and modes of attention, and nurture different dispositions towards landscape. As Hannah Macpherson emphasizes, walkers 'bring with them their own politics, cultures, histories, habitual responses and lived experiences (2016: 426), and Weston et al (2015) show how a recently expanded Peak District cycle network offers a range of routes that offer scenic affordances, exciting rough ground and slopes, as well as more sedate experiences.

In relation to these far-from-detached engagements, other recent research insists that the landscape that we see, feel, hear and smell is also a vibrant, vital landscape, continuously dynamic and emerging at all scales, a liveliness that includes all of its constituent elements. In the papers featured here, shifting forms of light and sound continuously resonate across landscapes and reverberate through bodies, the ceaseless geological and hydrological qualities of the landscape surrounding Tissington sustain the practice of well dressing, forgotten and concealed materialities incessantly work to produce poisonous upsurges and surface collapses, and water containing mineral fragments endlessly percolates through the ground to widen caverns, form

stalactites and stalagmites. Such lively materialities thus concern not only living organisms but inorganic stone, water, metal and minerals. By focusing upon the celestial, the underground, the sonic and the hydrological, these papers also underpin recent claims that the landscape has been flattened by an overwhelming focus on its horizontality, consolidating Tim Ingold's (2011) persuasive contention that there is continuous interpenetration between underground, surface and atmosphere, that landscape is thus also *vertical*.

An acknowledgement that landscape is affective, multi-sensual and vital invites alternative approaches to explore how it might be understood, sensed, practised and represented. Curiously, the *dérives* and *detournements* beloved of psychogeographers that seek to defamiliarize space have rarely been deployed in rural contexts (though see the recent account by Ian Marchant, 2015). However, other tactics have defamiliarized the Peak landscape using light. The annual Matlock Bath Illuminations turn an archetypal romantic woodland walk alongside the River Derwent into a fantastic display of vernacular illumination that attracts thousands of visitors (Edensor, 2017), an month-long event, *Derwent Pulse*, deployed scores of floating, illuminated balls that flowed down the course of the river, and George Jaramillo's light installation transformed the nocturnal landscape of Bonsall Moor (2016). Supernatural and uncanny tales also possess the capacity to deepen and disorient apprehension of landscapes, as at the Mermaid's Pool and Black Mere Pool, bodies of water in which mermaids are said to reside, far from the sea.

Many representations of the Peak District landscape in television, tourism promotion and advertising undoubtedly recycle common visual and narrative tropes that reproduce 'romantic' views and feature selective scenes and sites. Such images and texts continue to produce common sense understandings that motivate visitors, influence anticipation and shape practice of consuming landscape, distinguishing the Peak District as an extra-ordinary landscape within broader semiotic conventions of tourist promotion (Crouch et al, 2009). However, as Cooper and Edwards emphasize here, and as the essays in this collection underline, the Peak landscape is one of multiplicity; it is the subject of diverse, contested, fragmented and idiosyncratic representations. And because representations of the Peak District have not been as monolithic or reiterative as those of another national park, the Lake District, there is greater scope to construe divergent, alternative and peculiar depictions that resonate with recent attempts to reconfigure landscape. This extends from the experimental, ecocentric and unspectacular concerns of the 'new nature writing' (Moran, 2014) and the visceral, playful poetry featured by Cooper that draws out the ambivalent and ambiguous qualities of the landscape, to an approach to painting in which, according to Veronica Vickery, 'the contingent and individually subjective hand of the artist acts to mirror many of the provisional and unsettled conditions of landscape under which the work is being

undertaken' (2016: 324). In Vickery's work, a stretch of stream is rendered in composite depictions that adopt various angles, scales and near and far collisions, different materialities, artistic pursuits and references to historical representations of landscape. Moving away from the visual, Holloway's paper underlines how the conjuring of the past during an encounter with landscape can be solicited through sound. This sonic reimagining and resounding produces a range of affective, sensory and emotional registers, saturating the landscape with intimations of melancholy, stoicism and piety. Importantly, Shirley's discussion of well-dressing shows that representations of landscape and of the past may also be expressed through vernacular practices.

Beyond these deliberate creative impulses, inhabitants continuously represent landscapes in their everyday lives. Jaramillo's paper features the quotidian tales, gossip, speculations, rumours and memories that circulate among inhabitants of the Peak District but rarely extend into wider discursive channels. The poets discussed by Cooper also celebrate the landscape as a setting for social connections and convivialities, interactions that are further exemplified in Shirley's account of well-dressing. A consideration of how a focus on the mundane can decentre normative representations and conceptions might also include explorations of historically distant modes of encountering and making sense of landscape (Whyte, 2015). As Jess Edwards shows in his discussion of 17th century interpretations of Peak landscapes (2012), Thomas Hobbes' accounts brim with a curiosity impelled by early scientific enquiry as well as intimations of the violent tumult of natural processes wholly at variance to later romantic constructions of the sublime, the picturesque and the benign harmony of nature.

In surmising upon the relationship between the past and landscape, David Harvey (2015) contends that while dominant interpretations of heritage and landscape have foregrounded the tangible and the visual, often according to expert, classificatory schemes, these have been vigorously challenged by approaches that focus on affective, emotional and sensual experiences triggered by encountering haunted, vague and unknowable vestiges of past lives and processes. Recent accounts have explored rural landscapes of ruination, paying attention to the sensory and affective charge of the decaying, disorganized materialities that are encountered, while also acknowledging that such ruins have been produced by wider capitalist processes of creative destruction (Armstrong, 2011), may serve as powerful elements in place-identity (Wheeler, 2014) and become sites at which resistance may be articulated and mobilized (Robertson, 2015). Jaramillo's account foregrounds the ruinous, abject and decidedly unromantic spaces that litter the interstices and less touristic realms of the Peak landscape.

Henri Lefebvre maintains that 'the most important thing is to multiply the readings of the city' (1996: 159), a maxim that should also be applied to rural spaces and landscape. This special issue aims to exemplify how different perspectives might unsettle normative ways of writing and thinking about landscape. It seems profoundly evident that no single account of landscape can claim to be singularly truthful, since when we are in and with the landscape, the inevitable selectivity of our attention means that we can never attend to most things. What it is that we turn our attention towards and away from? Who and what shapes this 'attentional performativity' (Hannah, 2013: 242)? This issue aims to divert attention *away* from reiterative narratives and preoccupations through which the Peak District is framed and divert attention *towards* less evident landscape features, qualities, practices and representations.

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