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The anthropology of landscape: materiality, embodiment, contestation and emotion

Introduction

Landscape is a subject of study that belongs to nobody. It has long been studied in various ways and under various guises by geologists, social and cultural geographers, planners, ecologists, historians and art historians, archaeologists and anthropologists. Landscapes form the basis for much poetry and innumerable novels and are thus of interest to literary critics. Discussions of landscape are a mainstay of much social and political journalism. To be interested in landscape is thus to enter a promiscuous field criss-crossed by different theoretical and methodological perspectives, values and interests. To some this undoubtedly makes the topic exasperating; nobody can adequately define or tie down the term, it is out of control and therefore of no analytical value. To others, such as ourselves, the inherent ambiguity of the term and the diversity of approaches and perspectives used to study it is precisely that which makes the study of landscape so interesting and valuable. Such a topic is inexhaustible and unbounded; rhizomic rather than rooted (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 5–25), perspectives on landscape pop up anywhere and often in an unpredictable manner. In many of these studies the term never appears because others such as space and place and the environment – even more broadly, the world – subsume it.

Landscape is thus an absent presence in a huge body of scholarship. In anthropology, books with landscape in the title were virtually absent twenty-five years ago (Tilley 1994). Since then there has been a growing interest in and development of landscape studies in books (Bender 1993; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995; Feld and Basso 1996; Ingold 2000; Bender

and Winer 2001; Stewart and Strathern 2003; Tilley 2006; Arnason *et al.* 2012; Jarowski and Ingold 2012) and in many journal articles. While the traditional output of research in social and cultural anthropology has been the ethnographic monograph hardly a single one has appeared foregrounding the study of landscape as a topic worthy of consideration in its own right during the last two decades. Ethnographic studies of landscape are thus usually compressed into small vignettes within an overall disciplinary field that swallows them up. An exception can be found in the recent studies of Lavolette (2011a; 2011b). One of these volumes is about landscape only in a metaphorical sense, its focus actually being on extreme sports such as cliff jumping, extreme surfing and urban parkour. The other considers a huge region, Cornwall in south-west England, from a variety of different perspectives, with its chief focus being how cultural metaphors of identity are materialized. In its consideration of a variety of different social groups – amateur footballers, artists, farmers, fisherfolk, immigrants, landscape gardeners, scholars and tourists – it comes closest to the general perspective taken up in this volume. But Lavolette’s landscape analysis is on a macro scale. It embraces a whole series of different landscapes within Cornwall, like a series of Chinese boxes, one inside the other. His informants, by and large, don’t bump into each other in their daily lives as they are dispersed over a huge peninsula. This study by contrast considers a small-scale landscape from different individual and social perspectives, enabling us to consider embodiment, materiality and contestation in a quite different manner because our informants are constantly co-present with others in the same landscape.

This book is an extended study of a particular rural landscape in south-west England. While we have no wish to rigidly define the term landscape we want to briefly highlight below what we regard as the main features of this particular landscape study and what it may have to offer.

- **Biography:** we examine the biographies of persons and the manner in which the landscape becomes part of whom they are, what they do and how they feel.
- **Place:** we discuss the manner in which different individuals are involved in place-making activities, that is to say how they name places, sometimes not places on any Ordnance Survey topographic map, the places they like or dislike (Tuan’s topophilia and topophobia; Tuan 1974, 1977). In this respect we consider landscape as being a set of relationships between places in which meaning is grounded in existential consciousness, event, history and association: wisdom ‘sits in places’ (Basso 1996).

- **Motility:** we discuss the manner in which persons and groups move across the heathland landscape: the paths that they follow and the manner in which they move, on their own or accompanied by others. The temporality of movement and the sequences in which persons encounter places along the way may be fundamental to how people experience landscapes and thus feel about them (Tilley 1994: 27ff.; Ingold 2007, 2011).
- **Mediation:** we discuss how the manner in which the heathland is encountered and understood alters according to whether people walk across it (and the manner in which they walk; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Tilley 2012) or whether their encounter is technologically mediated – by modes of transport such as cycling; by activities involving tools such as fishing, flying model aircraft or holding a rifle; by riding across it on a horse; or by being accompanied by a dog.
- **Agency, aesthetics, and well-being:** we consider what the landscape, as a sensuously encountered material form, does for people and in reciprocal relationship what it does for them (Gell 1998; Milton 2002; Tilley 2004, 2008, 2010; Laviolette 2011a).
- **Conflict and contestation:** we discuss the ways in which differing attitudes and values to landscape relate to different modes of encounter and priorities: the politics of landscape (Bender and Winer 2001; Tilley 2006).
- **Nature and culture:** what do these terms mean to people in the context of this landscape? While academics happily dispute the value of the opposition (e.g. Descola and Palsson 1996; Descola 2013; Darrier 1999; Strang 1997; Ingold 2000; Castree and Braun 2001; MacNaughton and Urry 1998), nature is to others an invaluable term informing their environmental ethics and politics and their encounters with the world. To strip a concept of nature away may thus have unintended and disempowering social and political effects in terms of a rapidly developing global crisis in which humanity is destroying the environment on which it depends.

We consider the archaeological and historical development of this landscape in a companion volume to this. Anthropology rapidly turns into history. In fact it is already history by the time that it is published. The ethnographic present of this book is the period 2008–2012, when the fieldwork was carried out. We wish to elaborate below in much more detail on four key concepts that inform the structure of the entire book: materiality, embodiment, contestation and emotion.

Materiality

A considerable amount of recent scholarship concerned with landscape has stripped it of its materiality. By this we mean that the research is thoroughly mediated by discourses and representations. Examples include writings, maps, photographs, paintings, drawings, an entire apparatus by means of which we vicariously inform ourselves about something out there and distant from our desks. We see and understand landscapes through the representations of others and, in turn, these representations become the object of further discourses. So in a somewhat bizarre manner cultural geographers Cosgrove and Daniels can define landscape as 'a cultural image, a way of representing things' (1988: 11). Matless (1998) discusses the English rural landscape largely in terms of its iconographic representation. Images take precedence to people and place. Other scholars similarly taking a 'post-structuralist' turn instead assimilate landscape to text. Duncan conceives landscape as 'one of the central elements in a cultural system, a text' (Duncan 1990: 17). Such a text is a signifying system through which a social system is communicated and experienced: one reads it like a book, and one does not necessarily need to be there in order to do that, to experience it; indeed one does not need to talk to anybody in order to write about it in a univocal fashion (see for example Gregory's astute comments (Gregory 1994: 298ff.) on Soja's (1989) representation of the Los Angeles urban landscape). Daniels and Rycroft (1993) are content to map modern Nottingham through the novels of Paul Sillitoe, rather than gaining knowledge through walking the streets. We are not arguing that pictorial or textual representations of landscape are uninteresting or unimportant to analyse (see e.g. Laviolette's anthropological mapping of Cornish identities in terms of images (2011b: 80ff.)), nor contesting that they may constitute very powerful ways through which people know and experience physical landscapes, so much so that texts or imagery begin to constitute and structure encounters and experience of material landscapes. Quite the contrary, it is just that they have tended to dominate much discussion. Indeed, they have been taken by some as defining what landscapes actually are and what the object of a landscape study actually is. We offer a thoroughly materialist approach here as an antidote and counterpoint.

From our perspective in this book representations of landscape, textual or pictorial, are of secondary significance and we should treat them as such; they are selective and partial, and often highly ideological, ways of seeing and knowing. In fact it is through material experience

that we can understand the ideological nature of these representations, the manner in which they quite literally frame the landscape, far better than by undertaking any desk-bound analysis. We make the simple and somewhat blindingly obvious comment that walking is not a text, cutting down a gorse bush is not a text, training to be a soldier is not a text, a body is not a text, hills and rivers and trees are not texts. A materialist approach to landscape is thus a return to the real, and we regard it as a way to reinvigorate and redirect the study of landscape. The move is from representation to the materially grounded messiness of everyday life and the minutiae of material practices that constitute it. A stress on the materiality of landscape means that the anthropologist/researcher needs to be there, to experience the landscape through the sensual and sensing body, through his or her corporeal body. The body becomes a primary research tool. Such an emphasis on being there and observing and interacting with others stresses performativity: the manner in which our identities and those of others are constituted in and through action, and the manner in which these identities come into being through performances of identity (Butler 1990).

Fortunately there is a very long tradition in anthropology of participant observation and subaltern studies on which to draw, one that has continued to have a very significant impact on the ways in which anthropologists have written about landscape and that is manifested in many of the various studies cited above. As Ingold has cogently noted: 'we owe our very being to the world we seek to know. In a nutshell participant observation is a way of knowing from the inside ... Only because we are already of the world, only because we are fellow travellers along with beings and things that command our attention, can we observe them' (Ingold 2013: 5). We also draw on another rich and increasingly prominent anthropological tradition, that of material culture studies themselves (for recent work see e.g. Tilley *et al.* 2006; Miller 1998, 2005, 2010; Ingold 2013). These involve an insistence that persons and things are mutually constitutive. A landscape is certainly a complex kind of thing. Unlike an artefact, we cannot grasp it in our hands or move it around at will. It forms a material medium in which we dwell and move and think. We are not somehow outside it, or contained by it; landscape is part of ourselves, a thing in which we move and think. Therefore we cannot think of it in any way we like. It is not a blank slate for conceptual or imaginative thought but a material form with textures and surfaces, wet and dry places, scents and sounds, diurnal and seasonal rhythms, places and paths and cultural forms and built architecture that, through differential experience, is constitutive of different identities. So the

landscape is both inside the body and outside of it, both part of whom we are and a thing apart. Persons and landscapes are entangled in a network of material and social relations (for general discussions of the intertwining of persons and things and their consequences see Olsen 2010; Hicks and Beaudry 2010; Hodder 2012) providing both affordances and constraints for the performance of identities that always occur in particular material and cultural contexts. Landscape is thus an intertwining of the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world, to use Merleau-Ponty's metaphor (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 142). Landscape is undoubtedly a very complex material thing to attempt to understand or make sense of since it is, to use Latour's (1993) term, a quasi-object, something constructed and made; a cultural product, but having an independent existence with its own rhythms and purposes. We are touched by this fleshly material world of landscape and in turn touch it. In the process we transform ourselves.

Embodiment

Embodiment is a key term informing the discussions of this book in the individual chapters in [Part I](#) and [II](#). Here we wish to briefly outline what is meant by this term from a phenomenological perspective broadly inspired by the philosophical writings of Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968), and other interpreters of his work. Collapsing a mind/body dualism, the body is both object and subject, but the relation between the two is internal so that subjectivity does not arise in the mind or in consciousness but is in the body. Both subjectivity and the physical character of the body as a thing or object are related to the corporeality of body and mind: what a body is and what a body can do. The whole notion of a disembodied consciousness is simply a manifestation of idealist thought itself. Such a consciousness cannot exist because the mind inheres in the body and is not independent from the body. It follows that the kinds of distinctively human bodies that we have are part and parcel of the manner in which we think about and experience the world. Our consciousness is thus structured in tandem with our bodies as sensuous, carnal and subjective things.

Merleau-Ponty argues that our sensuous perceptual activity ends in objects, a position that runs counter to the naïve empiricist view that assumes a world of impressions and stimuli that exist in themselves in relation to which the body responds and reacts. Instead, the body constitutes both the cognitive ground of culture and its existential ontological ground (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Cszordas 1990; Desjarlais and

Throop 2011; Jackson 1995, 1996). Objects are a secondary result of thought. This does not mean that these objects are immaterial or purely a product of the mind. Instead objects are part of the same social and material world that we inhabit. We ‘produce’ or ‘recognize’ them through reflecting on that world and the process is indeterminate insofar as we can never sense the entire world from the determinate situatedness of our bodies. We exist in the world and relate to it from a point of view – the setting of our bodies. So perception begins in the ‘pre-objective’ material and subjective body and ends in the objects that the body perceives in relation to it: ‘my experience breaks forth into things and transcends itself in them, because it always comes into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 303).

The bodily setting in relation to the world that we are concerned with in this book is that of landscape, which provides, we argue, an existential ground for our embodied being: we are both in it and of it, we act in relation to it, it acts in us. Landscape is a product of our reflective activity arising from our pre-reflective or pre-objective bodily relation to it (for a detailed discussion see Marratto 2012). Bodies and landscapes thus produce each other in mutual relation, in the process of motility and inhabitation. In the most basic sense the agency of landscape is embodied because it acts on us through the mediation of our bodies. The thinking, subjective mind emerges in relation to the landscape and ends in its perception. Thus the body may be both subject and object, sensing and sensed within a landscape setting. It may be experienced from the ‘inside’, through kinaesthetic sensations conveying information about posture, position and movement, or from the ‘outside’ as a body among others intersubjectively constituted through a mutual relation with other persons in culture.

A seemingly contrasting perspective is provided by Latour (2004), who argues that the body should instead be conceived as an interface between different subjectivities and objects; it is from this that perception arises. He makes no distinction here between ‘natural’ objects and material culture objects. Both play an equally important role in the constitution of subjectivity rather than being a product of bodily perception that cannot exist anterior to perception. This is a perspective used by Vilaça (2009) in a discussion of Amazonian bodies used to critique an ‘embodiment paradigm’. What is at stake here is exactly how we regard the primary locus of perceptual activity taking place, and it seems to us a kind of chicken-or-egg question lacking any satisfactory answer.

Lakoff and Johnson (1990, 1999) explore the manner in which our everyday cognitive capacities are rooted in relation to our bodily being and emotional capacities in contemporary western culture: the manner in which we perceive things to be near or far, to the left or right of us, behind or in front of us, below or above us, forms the basis for our everyday, ordinary taken-for-granted and pre-reflective metaphors by means of which we represent the real in language: the foot or brow of the hill, the face of the clock, the legs of the table and so on. Happy is up, sad is down, etc. etc. (1999: 49ff.). Metaphors are an ever-present part of our language and the way in which we represent the world. They form particular understandings of the landscapes we inhabit and the manner in which they are empowered or naturalized (Tilley 1999, 2004).

Lakoff and Johnson point out strongly that because reason is not independent of perception and emotion the distinction between animals and humans is not easily drawn. In fact human reason is a form of animal reason (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 17) because both have a bodily basis involving categorization of food, mates, predators and members of the same species. Such reasoning obviously differs nonetheless in terms of the manner in which it is embodied and through the perceptual senses. Human conceptual reason does not reflect external reality because it is mediated and shaped by the sensorimotor capabilities of our bodies, as it is for other animals. This is important in understanding the embodied relations between persons and animals and the manner in which each understands and perceives the other, so much so that we may consider persons and animals in some instances, such as the rider on a horse, or a dog and a dog-walker, as co-beings mediating each other's relationship to the landscape (see discussions in Chapters 7 and 8).

While animals may actively mediate a human embodied relationship with the landscape, so do technologies. In our everyday pre-reflective relations with the world we do not think in terms of subject-object relations. We typically use tools as extensions of our body: the soldier and his rifle (see Chapter 3) or the fisherman (gender intended) and his rod and line (see Chapter 10). We become adept at using them and only atypically do we regard them as objects of contemplation. Much work on technology, while elaborating on the processes of making and using things and describing them in terms of complex operational chains, has tended to neglect consideration of their sensuous embodied material character. Things extend our sensorimotor capacities out from the body and into the setting of the world. In the process perception and understanding may be materially extended. In this case the agency of things consists in their ability to shape and mediate human actions. They do

this as part of a field of relations with others, a domain of social practice, a dialectic of embodiment and objectification or a bringing forth into the world (Bourdieu 1977: 87ff.; Tilley 2006a). Warnier's 'praxeological' approach (2001) usefully fuses a consideration of bodily techniques and instrumental techniques to understand how skilled practices become subjectively internalized (for a variety of perspectives on these themes see Ihde 1990, 2002; Ingold 2013; Lemonnier 2013; and most especially Coupaye 2013).

Another key aspect of an approach emphasizing embodiment is a consideration of spatio-temporal relationships. Space and time are not somehow outside social relations and acting to contain them but arise from their embodied relation to persons. So what is near or far, here or there, bounded or unbounded differs in relation to the body itself and its motility in the world. So duration and the 'depth' of the landscape and what constitutes the horizon become part of the pre-objective constitution of bodily perception. Past experiences feed into the present, anticipating the future. Our temporal experience 'colours' the manner in which we understand the present from the lived perspective of the body. This is always limited, ambiguous, shifting and changing; some aspects of landscape become foregrounded at one temporal moment and fall into the background at another. Embodied perception shifts and changes, is always in flux and is related to our interactions with sentient others, human or non-human. Our perceptual senses engage with our embodied being all at once in synaesthetic relation. We do not see the world and then hear it or smell it or touch it. All our perceptual senses intermingle in our embodied experience and all at once, a position currently being valuably explored in the emerging sub-discipline of sensory anthropology (Classen 1993, 2005; Stoller 1989; Howes 1991, 2005; Pink 2009; Ingold 2011).

Contestation

Meinig (1979) invites us to imagine a landscape thus: a group of different people go to the top of a hill and look down and across the panorama of landscape below. Each is invited to describe the landscape before them: what do they see? Meinig lists ten versions of the same scene: the landscape may be regarded in various ways as nature, habitat, artefact, system, a problem, as a source of wealth, as ideology, history and so on. Why the people might describe it in these very different ways relates to their point of view and their interests and values, so inevitably the

landscape seen from the 'beholding eye' means something radically different for a property developer, a local historian, an earth scientist, an artist and so on. Ten versions of the same thing is obviously an arbitrary number: there could be many more or less. The general point though is that political, economic, moral and aesthetic interests and values colour what people see and may inevitably lead to radically different attitudes.

Landscapes are thus inevitably contested. They are valued precisely because they are valuable, part of people's lives. They reflect the complexity of their lives. They are historically contingent and their mutability stems from the various ways in which people understand them and engage with the material world. So landscapes are untidy and messy, tensioned, always in the making (Bender 1993, 1998, 2006; Bender and Winer 2001). Our landscapes of modernity are frequently on the move and peopled by diasporas and migrants of identity, people making homes in new places. They may be structures of feeling, outcomes of social practice, products of colonial and post-colonial identities and the western gaze, bound up with class divisions, property and ownership, outcomes of the contemplative sublime or places of terror, exile and slavery (Tilley 2006: 8). For some, an increasingly small minority, landscapes are 'taskscapes' (Ingold 2000: 189ff.) in which they earn a living. For the vast majority landscapes have become pleasure grounds where they pursue their interests and foster their own personal development. This inevitably produces conflicts of purpose and value, discussed at length in [Parts I and II](#) of this book. The landscape provides different possibilities and potentialities for different groups and that which is good for one is not necessarily so for another. Some may want the landscape to stay the same and conserve it, others may want to develop, alter or enhance it.

Emotion

Emotion or feeling resides at the heart of our human capacity to experience landscapes as meaningful and a wish to prevent their destruction. Yet, as Johnson has remarked, there is very little sustained analysis of emotional meaning in philosophy or the social sciences more generally. What is deemed subjective, private and personal is no doubt regarded as lacking any cognitive significance and such irrational responses are not seen to merit 'serious' rational discussion (Johnson 2007: 53). Referring to recent research in neuroscience Johnson points out that basic emotions such as doubt, shame, fear and joy have a deep-seated bodily basis; they may arise from the body in a particular situation in the world (e.g. seeing a

venomous snake in front of you or the joy involved in the birth of a child). This pre-objective response of the body then gives rise to reflection, a process in which cultural meanings are integral. So we only realize that we feel something after a deep-seated response has taken part in embodied experience. Environmental psychologists have not shied away from considering the importance of emotional responses to environment and landscape. They have long held the view that emotion plays a key role (e.g. for early work see Kaplan 1973; Ittelson 1973; Wohlwill 1976).

Milton (2002), in a path-breaking anthropological study, has explored in depth the relationship between emotion and rationality in environmental policies and practices, in which contestation inevitably becomes an issue in relation to economic development. She examines the manner in which thoughts and feelings, goals, values and emotions emerge from personal engagement with the world. Why is humanity rapidly destroying the world? Why do we not care sufficiently about 'nature' to stop destroying it? Emotion, she argues, is the primary reason some people care about nature. Environmental campaigners are passionate about what they do and will speak about their feelings for and enjoyment of the natural world. These deep feelings for nature emerge from their perceptual experience of their environment. Working primarily with environmentalists in Britain and Ireland she astutely examines how environmental policies and practices get formulated in terms of a wider field of social and political relations. A fundamental difference between the manner in which modern western societies and indigenous traditional societies treat nature often involves the notion of the sacred. The former can destroy nature because they are separated from it whereas for the latter nature inheres in social being. Nature for us in the contemporary west is a resource to be used and exploited and bound up with land ownership.

In indigenous traditional society nature is usually not owned by individuals. It cannot be bought, sold and bounded but is sacred and intimately related to social identity. In destroying it people destroy part of themselves. Much has been written about this through the prism of the relationship of Australian aboriginal populations and their landscapes (Munn 1973; Strang 1977; Morphy 1993) to the indigenous cultures of North America in which the landscape is animate and peopled with spirits (e.g. Brody 1982; Nelson 1983; Tanner 1979; Hornborg and Kurkiala 1998). A rational scientific approach to nature has served capitalism very well by depersonalizing nature and in the process removing the moral responsibility for destroying it (Milton 2002: 40ff.). One of the cases she examines is that of a proposed super-quarry on the island of Harris in the Outer Hebrides. In

terms of a rationalist western discourse on environmental issues it is useless for protestors to claim that such a development should not go ahead because they love nature and this quarry would destroy a sacred mountain. Notions of sacredness are fine to take seriously in relation to traditional indigenous societies but not amongst ourselves in the west. Instead discourses of environmental protection have to be framed in terms of a rationalist logic of cost–benefit analysis, preferably in terms of that which can be measured, such as the visibility of the quarry in the landscape and its economic impact on tourism in what was designated as a national scenic area. A huge protest in these terms against the quarry emerged (Milton 2002: 137ff.). As Milton points out, while notions of natural beauty are inherently subjective and in the eye of the beholder, visibility can be objectively measured and calculated: ‘the defence of natural beauty, and the defence of the market interests that threaten it, have to be presented in an idiom that enables decision makers to appear independent. In western cultures, that idiom is scientific’ (Milton 2002: 139). Milton cogently argues that the opposition between rationality and emotion is a false one. Indeed it is irrational to reject emotion as a way of relating to and valuing landscape in public policy and other decision-making processes, for emotions are what make us human.

Carrier (2003) makes a similar argument in relation to conflict over environmental conservation in Jamaica. Here, as elsewhere, the motivation on the part of conservationists arises from their personal biographies, which stimulate their desire to protect the natural world from destruction – from their emotional attachment to and knowledge of a place. However conservation policy has to be formulated in a supposedly impartial rationalist logic for it to be an acceptable discourse and to be taken seriously.

A powerful emotional attachment to a certain place may also result in a tenacious feeling of ecological identity. Zavestoski notes through interviews and observation that:

it became apparent that most of the participants had either special places in nature, a place that had been special to them but was developed or destroyed, or a particular experience in nature that was significant in developing their concern for nature ... [and they] explained how expressing their concern for these special places as an emotional attachment or sense of oneness often resulted in strange looks or dismissive reactions

(Zavestoski 2003: 304)

Again we see here the regard with which the opposition between the supposedly rational and the emotional is held, so it is refreshing to find Alfred Wainwright's exclamation 'Lakeland is an emotion' (2003: 203); for him there was no fear of being held guilty of unscientific anthropomorphism.

De Nardi's research and writings on the Italian resistance in WWII provide a rich example of how emotion is embodied in this particular contested landscape. She explicitly probes the veteran's embodied experience, focusing on

the dynamics between space, the body and emotion, starting from the premise that collecting wartime histories means dealing with tales of the body and remembered corporeal experience (such as the discomfort and soiling of the body, and the violence perpetrated on the body) as well as through the gestures of the body in recollection ... the body is a pivotal site of memory.

(De Nardi 2014: 74)

De Nardi writes that throughout the exploration of the 'worlds of feelings' of the veterans she came to appreciate the 'embodied and situated nature of much Second World War storytelling, and the paramount role played by landscape and the environment in shaping emotions, memories and approaches to the past and the events of 1943–1945' (2014a: 444).

Closely linked to the sensual dimensions of emotional experience, identity (the definition of which is of itself 'complex and contested'), memory and motility within landscape are part of well-being. Indeed, it is only since the 1990s that there has been positive recognition of the association between emotional well-being and mental and physical health and of how this is influenced by physical activity (Fox 1999: 411–418; Stewart-Brown 1998: 1608–1609). A good example of an activity recognized to have an effect on well-being is *Shinrin-yoku* – forest-air bathing – during which participants walk and breathe in the 'volatile substances' released by trees. A popular form of relaxation in Japan, it has been shown to be of great benefit in reducing high stress levels, depression and hostility, all of which are major contributors to chronic heart disease (Morita *et al.* 2007: 54–63). These studies provide an invaluable background to the consideration of the particular landscape discussed in [Parts I and II](#) of this book. People are materially entangled and entwined with landscape and precisely because of that they are emotionally bound up with its past, present and future.

The Pebblebed heathland landscape of East Devon

The material context for this study is the East Devon Pebblebed heathland in south-west England. This is an area roughly bounded by the River Otter to the east, the Exe estuary to the west, the sea to the south and the Blackdown Hills to the north. The area covered by uncultivated heathland is small. At their maximum extent the heaths cover an almost continuous area of only about 13 km north–south, and 2–3 km east to west. In places the heath is broken up by areas of improved arable land. The Pebblebed heathlands acquire their name from the distinctive geology of the area. Fringed by rich pasturelands on clays and marls, the bedrock of the heathlands is made up of multicoloured and water-worn pebbles. These are the remains of a huge river that ran through the landscape during the Triassic era some 240 million years ago. Now what once was a river bed flowing through a sandy desert is raised up to form a low ridge surrounded by farmland and, beyond that, higher hills.

This landscape made up entirely of pebbles is unique and quite extraordinary in the UK (see Tilley 2010). The area, although settled from the Neolithic onwards, has never been cultivated as the soils are very thin and acidic. Today it is largely ungrazed, consisting of an open landscape of gorse, heather and bracken criss-crossed by streams and with many boggy areas of wet heath. It is a Site of Scientific Interest and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (see Chapter 2). All the historic and contemporary settlements in the area fringe the heathland; these include villages to the east and west, and the small towns of Budleigh Salterton and Exmouth to the south and south-west. The villages nestle in the valleys and it is possible to walk across the heathlands and see no trace of contemporary settlement. In some areas, furthest away from roads and car parks, one might not see a single person for an entire day except during weekends (for some historical accounts see Brighthouse 1981; S. and R. Elliott 2004; Stokes 1999). Although they are small in extent they seem vast. From high points there are extensive views south off the heathlands and across the sea. The nearest city is Exeter, some 11 km to the north-west (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

A significant part of the regional economy today is tourism, but the tourists are concentrated along the southern coastal fringe of the heathlands and very few visit or know about the heaths (see Chapter 6). Nobody dwells on the heaths today with the exception of the Royal Marines, and their dwelling is only temporary as part of their training exercises (Chapter 3). Those who work on the heaths or visit them are predominantly local people from the surrounding towns and villages and

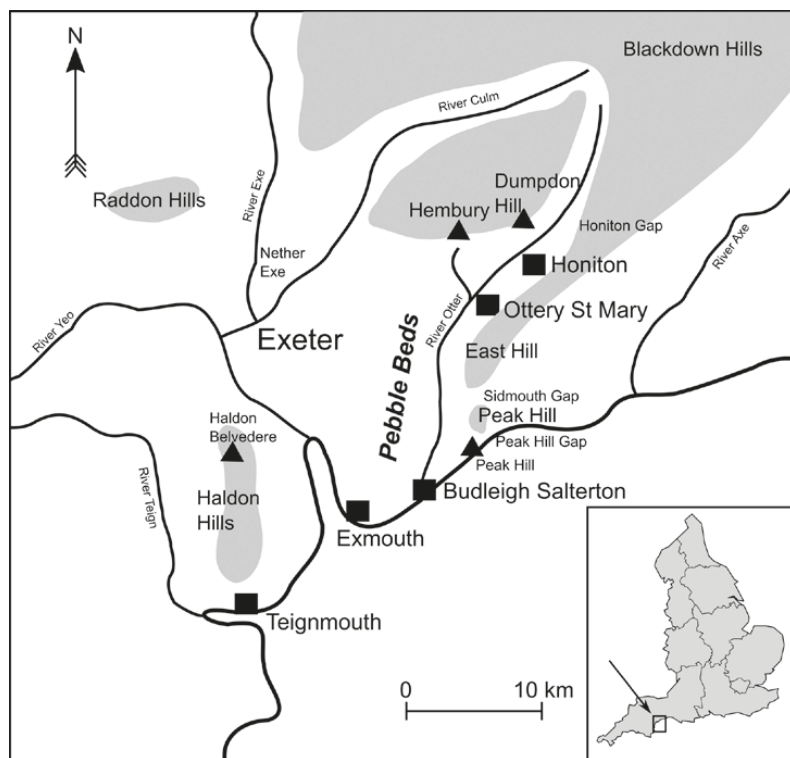


Figure 1.1 The location of the East Devon Pebblebed heathlands.
 Drawn by Wayne Bennett

the nearby city of Exeter. But even many locals, including people who have lived in the area all their lives, do not know anything about or visit the heathland. In this sense, it might be described as a ‘secret’ landscape within an otherwise quite densely settled area. In the book we consider the structure of ownership, the different groups who work in this heathland and earn a living from it, and those who use it for leisure activities. The local population is strikingly white and a significant proportion of them are elderly. Figures from the latest (2011) census show that the mean age of residents in the Budleigh Salterton area is 53.1, with 49% of people over 60, one of the highest proportions for any town in the UK, while 97% of the population is white British (Office for National Statistics 2011). Like other towns and cities along the coast of southern England it has become a favoured retirement area for wealthy outsiders, with a significant proportion of the population moving here from London and other cities in the UK.

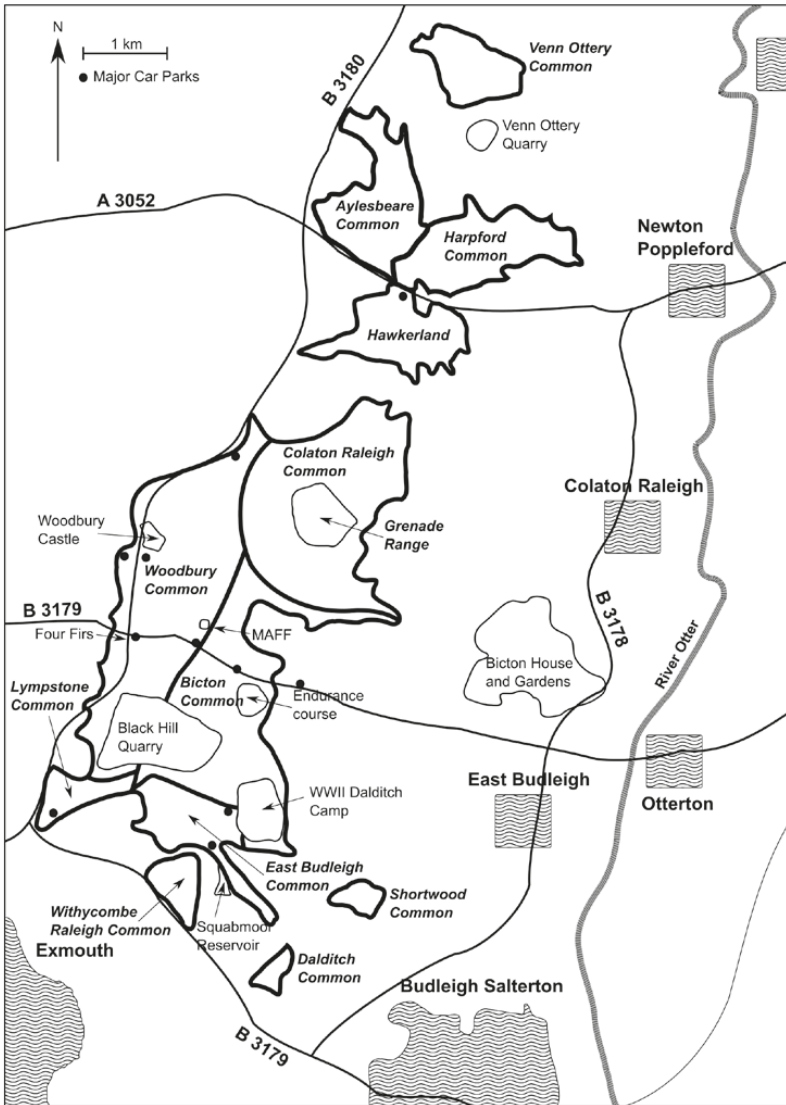


Figure 1.2 The main places on the heathlands discussed in the text.
 Drawn by Karolina Pauknerová

Social groups and the research field

The research is based on semi-structured interviews with 125 informants (see [Table 1.1](#)).

These were undertaken intermittently during a four-year period, 2008 to 2012. In addition to this, structured interviews were conducted in

Table 1.1 Informants interviewed, by category, age and gender. Categories are simplified insofar as eight individuals fell into two categories, e.g. as both a cyclist and a walker or a walker and an environmentalist.

Category	No. of Informants	Gender		Age 16–30	Age 31–60	Age > 60
		Female	Male			
Officials	11	4	7	0	9	2
Marines	14	0	14	8	6	0
Environmentalists	12	4	8	0	8	4
Quarry personnel and protestors	5	2	3	0	4	1
Cyclists	9	2	7	0	7	2
Horse riders	5	5	0	1	4	0
Walkers	25	8	17	0	8	17
Artists	7	5	2	0	6	1
Anglers	8	1	7	2	6	0
Model aircraft flyers	5	0	5	0	1	4
People with pebble structures	25	15	10	2	8	15
Archaeologists	7	3	4	0	6	1
	Total	49	84	13	73	47
	Percentage	39%	67%	10%	58%	37%

brief car-park surveys with fifty members of the general public visiting the heathlands (see [Chapter 6](#)). Some information concerning some of the interviewees – local people with pebble structures (i.e. walls, paths, ornamental features, etc.) in their gardens and archaeologists working temporarily on the heathlands as part of a landscape survey and excavation project – is discussed in the companion volume to this book (Tilley 2017); these discussions have informed some of the interpretation and analysis here. Six key informants, drawn from those managing the heathlands and from the Royal Marines who use them for training exercises, were interviewed on multiple occasions by both authors. The interviews took place in a variety of locations: roughly half on the heath itself, the others in people’s homes, places of work and local cafés. As is conventional, all names in the text have been changed except those of persons who are too well known to be disguised. Their permission to give their real names has been sought and kindly given.

Alongside these interviews we engaged in participant observation with a variety of individuals and different groups: we walked and traversed the heathland with those responsible for managing and maintaining it, camped out with the Royal Marines on some of their basic training exercises, experiencing the landscape with them during both daytime and night-time exercises, undertook litter picks with volunteers, joined groups of volunteers engaged in environmental management, and attended public and official meetings regarding the future of heathland management and quarry development. We were involved in the annual celebration of the heath (heath week held during the last week of July) on three consecutive years. During this a whole series of events are organized for the public: guided walks and wildlife rambles at dawn and at dusk, to listen to nightjars, activities for children such as pond dipping and learning about the work of archaeologists, visits to the quarry to hear about its pebble extraction and crushing operations. One of us took guided tours to archaeological sites and monuments as part of these events. We went out walking with groups of rambblers, watched people fishing and flying model aircraft. We observed walkers, cycling groups, horse riders and the Royal Marines crossing the heath on numerous occasions throughout the years and in all seasons. Much was learnt during a systematic archaeological survey of the entire heathland landscape during this period and from the vantage points of various excavation sites during fieldwork periods. We also asked selected informants to draw for us cognitive or mental maps of the heathland (Downs and Stea 1973; Gould and White 1993). These memory maps were not a test of knowledge but were intended to provide information about place preferences, places that mattered enough to people to include them in their maps. We regard these maps as their personal representations of the heathland as being another way of telling. The heathland became during this extended period of fieldwork very much part and parcel of our own biographies and identities and we developed a deep affection and visceral knowledge of it. Much of this experience sits in bodily memory and is impossible to convey and recount in mere words. Inevitably the discussions that follow select from our experiences and what we have learnt from talking to and engaging with others. The irony of any study of embodied identities and the subjective experiences of others and ourselves is that, as a representational discourse, it attempts to write that which cannot be written: much is lost or transformed in the process.

The book can be regarded as a contribution to what has been variously labelled over the last thirty years as ‘anthropology at home’ or ‘an anthropology of Britain’ (Strathern *et al.* 1981; Cohen 1982, 1987;

Jackson 1987; Rapport 1993, 2002). So this book is about Britain as an ethnographic region of study and it is being carried out at home. However, we are not particularly comfortable with either of these labels. First of all we do not consider anthropology carried out in the nation state in which one happens to live, or have been born, to be in principle any different from research carried out elsewhere. It may, of course, be linguistically less challenging, and in purely pragmatic terms easier than conducting research in an 'exotic' location. It also obviously relieves the angst and moral burden of a discipline still tainted by colonialism and, today, by the unequal power dynamics of a post-colonial encounter with the Other.

Second, the notion that there is any such thing as British culture or an enduring sense of Britishness to be discovered and isolated in a multicultural, globalized, hybridized and creolized world 'on the move' is rather difficult to maintain (Appadurai 1996; Eriksen 2010; Hannerz 2010; Rapport and Dawson 1998). At most Britishness or British culture in any broad sense of this term is simply a manifestation of an imagined community in Anderson's (1991) sense of the term, something produced and fabricated rather than shared and lived. But this point is too blunt and requires qualification. Any notion of a British culture constituted by a coherent and integrated series of ideas, beliefs and identities shared by all contemporary British subjects does not exist in the twenty-first century and furthermore never did exist. However, there is another more humble and everyday sense of Britishness that may still be said to persist and be shared by many British subjects. This is not usually a matter of overt and conscious identity construction in flag-waving and celebrations of royalty, but it may nevertheless be objectified in a myriad of everyday *material* forms and practices such as talking about the weather (Fox 2004), gardening (Tilley 2008, 2009), pubs, the popularity of walking (Chapter 8) and coarse fishing (Chapter 10). Such different practices may be completely unrelated in the daily lives of different British subjects, who may participate in only some or none of them. Furthermore, they are cut through and refracted in multiple ways through the prisms of gender, class, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and, in terms of localities and their histories, regions and nationalism.

This book differs substantially from some mainstream cultural and social anthropology in calling into question the latter's rather narrow focus on social and political relations as the principal object of study. For example Rapport, one of the most prominent and subtle practitioners of an anthropology of Britain in his study of 'Wanet', a village somewhere in a rural dale, somewhere in north-west England, considers the landscape only as a kind of backdrop in relation to which lives and plural

identities – including his own – get played out (Rapport 1993, 2010). ‘Wanet’ might be anywhere, or at the very least anywhere rural in this particular part of Britain. He suggests that the individual and his or her creativity is crucial for anthropological analysis, with the human psyche as central (Rapport 2002: 8). Anthropology is for Rapport thus primarily about mind, perhaps ultimately a form of individual and social psychological analysis.

The alternative view put forward here is that anthropology is a study of embodied material minds and should be primarily about the material social circumstances in which people find themselves and which they negotiate in and through their everyday material practices. It is this that is fundamental to an understanding of how people make sense of themselves and others. Some abstracted notion of mind and infinite creativity does not appear particularly useful to us, hence our stress on a nexus of terms – materiality, embodiment, contestation and emotion – in this study. Kinship, ‘village society’ or particular social institutions do not reside at its ‘core’. Instead we draw on an alternative tradition of material culture studies, as discussed above, together with a holistic and material notion of landscape as its foundation.

Conclusions

Landscapes gather, to use Heidegger’s felicitous term (Heidegger 2002: 355ff.). They gather topographies, geologies, plants and animals, persons and their biographies, social and political relationships, material things and monuments, dreams and emotions, discourses and representations and academic disciplines through which they are studied. So landscapes are mutable, holistic in character, ever-changing, always in the process of being and becoming. This book is an act of gathering in which the sum is more than the individual parts. Inevitably we have had to be highly selective and limit the discussions and the detail. Each of the individual chapters might have been developed into a book in itself. The study is an attempt to privilege breadth over depth since any study of landscape requires a holistic approach. The materiality of landscape always outruns us; the real turns into the surreal. We apologize in advance to particular subject specialists who may feel that important contributions have been ignored or overlooked in their own specific field of analysis or discipline of research. The objective here has been to develop a

perspective by means of which we can understand landscapes in terms of different performative practices, points of view and modes of embodied engagement. The book is thus a textual attempt to evoke the sheer complexity of the reciprocal manner in which persons engage with landscapes and landscapes engage with them from a variety of personal, moral, social, emotional, ethical and political perspectives.

