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CULTURAL LANDSCAPE:
archaeology, ancestors and archive

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Summary

A cultural landscape is a very personal thing, yet it is a phrase long-familiar in academia e.g a 1962 definition as ‘a concrete and characteristic product of the interplay between a given human community..’ A 1995 definition in a World Heritage context is that ‘Cultural landscapes mirror the cultures which created them'. Perhaps they can help us to perceive ourselves as part of a process creating and constantly changing the environment of which we are an integral part, nodes of memory for humankind in thinking about that process. Cultural landscape resides in the human mind, not on the ground, so we should avoid being didactic; for we cannot order someone to see a cultural landscape. As World Heritage Sites, cultural landscapes fall into three categories: 1. `Landscapes designed and created intentionally by man`, a definition which should perhaps have dealt more with recreation and aesthetics. 2. An ‘organically evolved landscape` can be either ‘relict’ or ‘continuing’; in each, a monument-led appraisal could well lead to a mis-reading of the real nature of the landscape. Western materialism threatens many of them and raises ethical issues. 3. An ‘associative’ landscape deals with intangibles and even negatives. A case study of *Les Causses* in southern France, part of a tentative World Heritage cultural landscape, raises many of the issues in practice.

Introduction

A cultural landscape is a very personal thing (Appleton 1986). My perception of what is involved has been honed along the way from Kakadu through Uluru-Kata Tjuta to Banawe in the Cordilleras, Hallstatt-Dachstein/Salzkammergut and Pyrenées-Mont Perdu. In other words, I am privileged enough not merely to have helped evaluate places which are now among the world's first World Heritage cultural landscapes, but also to be involved in the evolution of the concept of 'cultural landscape' as an intellectually acceptable and pragmatically workable development of the 1972 Convention (*passim* in von Droste *et al.* 1995; WHC *forthcoming*). This experience has clearly affected my perspective – and my sub-title.

I also come from a country which is at this moment systematically reviewing its tentative list of possible World Heritage nominations. It is cautiously thinking of two places, the Lake District and the New Forest, as potential cultural landscapes, while somewhat inconsistently refusing to go down that route at the moment because 'further work' is necessary (Smith 1998, 17). 'Further work' is always going to be necessary, but at least Britain starts with an initial discussion of named landscapes of the sort which might be considered (Fowler and Jacques 1995). Contrasting with such a broad-brush approach, my recent experience also includes sharing with others the realities of working on management plans for two World Heritage Sites (English Heritage 1996, 1998). All this contributes to my thoughts here which serve as a mildly reflective commentary on Henry Cleere's pragmatic description (*above* pp. 00-00), in that I too use the World Heritage definitions of cultural landscapes as my framework (WHC 1997, 9-10). Given the Austrian context of this paper, its emphasis is, however, European.

Definitions

New though the concept may be in a World Heritage context, 'cultural landscape' is a phrase long-familiar in academia and specifically in human geography (Wagner and Mikesell 1962; Jones 1966; Birks 1988). Aitchison (1995) provides the European context for our discussion here under a reminder of Wagner and Mikesell's (1962) very useful definition: 'Cultural Landscape – a concrete and characteristic product of the interplay between a given human community, embodying certain cultural preferences and potentials, and a particular set of natural circumstances. It is a heritage of many eras of natural evolution and of many generations of human effort.' Significant phrases, because they embody key concepts, there for present

considerations are ‘product of the interplay’, ‘cultural preferences’, ‘natural evolution’, and ‘generations of human effort.’ The idea that cultural landscapes are produced as a result of ‘effort’ is particularly apt.

Other definitions are provided throughout what is at the moment the only authoritative published study of the concept as World Heritage (von Droste *et al.* 1995). Phillips (1995, 380) view is functional, emphasising the importance of such landscapes ‘to the conservation of nature and biodiversity’, remarking that ‘the value of these places as repositories of biological richness seems bound to increase.’ His wide-ranging definition also includes their contributions to people psychologically and for enjoyment and learning. von Droste himself is succinct and more cognitive: 'A cultural landscape is a complex phenomenon with a tangible and intangible identity. The intangible component arises from ideas and interactions which have an impact on the perceptions and shaping of a landscape, such as sacred beliefs closely linked to the landscape and the way it has been perceived over time. Cultural landscapes mirror the cultures which created them' (von Droste *et al*. 1995, 15).

Such concepts of `cultural landscape` share a common core which has grown, under the influence of modern ecology, environmental archaeology and conservation, out of a sort of intellectual symbiosis which sees a model of humanity as part of Nature. Essentially, with the concept of cultural landscape, we could be dealing with a vision which could enable us to perceive ourselves as part of a process creating and constantly changing the environment of which we are an integral part. Cultural landscapes could, indeed should, be the nodes of memory for humankind in thinking about that process. In our lifetimes, the science-based approaches of historical ecology, geomorphology and landscape archaeology have brought us to a different understanding of the environment of which we are a part and not merely in. Many local perceptions merge with the global perception of scholarly strategists like Goudie (1990) and Simmons (1989) who perceive in their perspective the humanising of the whole world`s environment.

In the immediate future, ‘cultural landscape’ should therefore be a significant medium in countering pessimism of ‘the end of the world is nigh’ variety as we approach and cross the millennial threshold. More long-term, it could affect the way we think by converting anthropocentric tendencies into a more productive process whereby we find new relationships between nature and human societies. A stretch of countryside can embody and represent such relationships; but we have to be able to perceive that

evidence and appreciate its significance. We need to sense that conjunction of physical remains and intangible associations in those special places, and be able to recognise that a cultural landscape had been created where previously there was just geography. That line of argument clearly leads to the conclusion that a cultural landscape resides in the human mind, not on the ground. Hallstatt, for example, has existed for over three thousand years but it was only in 1996, when we were ready to receive the idea, that the place transformed itself, not physically but in our minds, into a cultural landscape.

The core idea now seems to be recognised that a `cultural landscape` is one in which at the very least human beings have impacted on Nature. It also commonly means that people and Nature have interacted, not just impacted, and that the results of that interaction give the landscape in view its particular character as we see it, strongly influenced by intellectual fashion as well as by scientific evidence. In other words, what we see is an acculturated acquisition, such values as we perceive in a particular landscape being extrinsic, not intrinsic. We – academics, advisers, and officials of global and state organisations, - should therefore avoid being didactic, for we cannot order someone to see a cultural landscape any more than we can instruct someone to write Beethoven's Ninth.

'World Heritage' has inched its way into the world's consciousness over the last twenty years (Pressouyre 1993, 1996), importantly for cultural landscapes since it has given that concept both status and a practical definition. The latter identifies three main categories:

- 1.`landscapes designed and created intentionally by man`
- 2. `the organically evolved landscape`, a category which sub-divides into two:
    - i. a relict or fossil landscape
    - ii. a continuing landscape
- 3. `the associative cultural landscape`

Category 1 is meant for great designed gardens and parklands, common to many cultures; but numerous whole functional landscapes, like the ancient ones on Dartmoor in England and at Banawe in the Phillippines, are as deliberate and managed, quite as much `designed and created intentionally by man`, as are the great parks and gardens of the English Enlightenment and the Austrian Empire. The definition of a Category 1 cultural landscape should perhaps have dealt more with

recreation and aesthetics, which is what parks and gardens are about, rather than emphasising deliberateness.

The ‘relict landscape’ of Category 2.i is a familiar concept to archaeologists, not least in Britain with its many excellent examples of `dead` landscapes such as Bodmin Moor (Johnson and Rose 1994). But we have to be very careful, for a visual, monument-led appraisal could well lead to a mis-reading of the real nature of a landscape in historical, processual terms. Fyfield and Overton Downs, England, illustrate the point (Pl. I). They comprise a landscape with an apparently ‘relict archaeology’ in the form of extensive physical remains no longer in use for their original purpose. Detailed examination over decades (Fowler *forthcoming*; Fowler and Blackwell 1998*)* shows, however, that such relatively dramatic remains of cultivation and settlement belonged to mere episodes in the long-term history of the place which always has been, and still is, primarily concerned with pasturing livestock, mainly sheep. At a deeper level of understanding of processes in rural ways of life, as distinct from the mapping and dating of ancient remains, these deeply agrarian Downs are not relics, though they contain many relict features. Intellectually, they are not a ‘relict landscape’ but belong to Category 2.ii, the `continuing landscape`.

In World Heritage terms a ‘continuing landscape’ ‘retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress.’ That fits those Wiltshire Downs exactly. So too do the Banawe rice terraces in Luzon, the Phillippines (Villalon 1995). The danger there, however, is that the `evolutionary process still in progress`, that is the dramatic effects of Western materialism, are about to destroy the social fabric. The nature of that process raises another question: have we in the First World, often self-appointed conservationists to the whole world, the right to expect the peasants of Luzon to go on living in material poverty for the sake of preserving a working but archaic landscape and the way of life which is a pre-condition of its survival as a ‘continuing landscape’?

Ethics apart, the tension in both those examples is between contemporary economics and perceptual values superimposed on a particular landscape. In my third example hard economics are both the facts of life and overt motivators of policies which seek to mitigate them. The area concerned is called *Les Causses* in southern France (Marres 1935; Bonniol and Saussol 1995). Building on a great deal of research by others, a number of us are studying it from various points of view – etymological (Thomas 1994), archaeological

(Fowler 1998) and palaeo-pedological (current fieldwork and laboratory analysis), - with a related interdisciplinary project examining the landscape in terms of contemporary socio-economics. We call this last project CLESC, an acronym for *Causses: landscape, economics and social change.* Its approaches and potential seem particularly relevant to considerations of cultural landscape (CLESC 1998).

Les Causses are an area of dissected limestone uplands at 900-1000 m. above sea level lying across the southern edge of the Massif Central. Their flora is richly sub-Alpine, their fauna legendary among bird-watchers and now enriched for tourist purposes by Siberian wolves, North American bison, North African camels, Egyptian vultures and Mongolian horses. One can but hope they do not all escape on the same night. The indigenous speleology shares a history of scientific development with that in the Austrian Alps, not least through that remarkable man, Edward Martel (Martel 1936). He also pioneered archaeological exploration, a tradition continued today among a field archaeology which is of European quality in terms of its survival. But beware that Fyfield example: megaliths apart, here the extensive remains are of arable landscapes in an area traditionally dominated by sheep, pasture and transhumance. Village flocks of 300-500 are the norm but, picturesque though they may be, the economy they represent is fragile and narrowly-based, being predominantly dependent on the world's taste for Rocquefort cheese. Diversification options are limited by various factors, not least geology, geography and demography, and conventional mass tourism development is neither likely nor desired (Galibert 1982). Massively subsidised to bring mains water and electricity to most parts, the area nevertheless has high unemployment among a very small and thinly spread agricultural population which is generally at a low standard of living characteristically lacking services like shops and public transport. Depopulation continues despite further financial support through numerous public agencies, not least the European Community.

This place is indeed in Europe, - though I might well have been giving a pen-sketch of an area in the Third World, - and furthermore in one of Europe's richest countries. Why, you may well ask, bring all this into a discussion of cultural landscapes? Because a large part of the area I have briefly indicated is already a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and, together with the adjacent Cevennes National Park, is included on the French 'list of indisputable sites' to be proposed for nomination to the World Heritage List as a cultural landscape (Megret and Collin 1995). The idea is totally justified, in my judgement, but everyone needs to be quite clear about the

proper justification for such an inscription within Category 2.ii. The Causses are not a wilderness; they form a living landscape, and their desert-like, deserted appearance, supremely represents the interaction of the natural circumstances with thousands of years of agrarian ways of life. They do indeed contain excellent natural resources and a well-preserved and detailed archaeology but the Causses are really one big monument in themselves to the countless, anonymous people who, as in so many other parts of the world, have laboured, lived and doubtless loved on and beyond the thin-soiled margins of hospitable land.

The third category, the associative cultural landscape, in contrast deals with intangibles and even negatives - `powerful religious, artistic and cultural associations of the natural element rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent.` The thought here attempts to recognise that for many, many people in the world, the landscape is not only full of gods without machines but in many cases actually is the thing to be worshipped, the deity itself. Nature is, as it were, god and vice-versa. If you have been lucky enough to go round Uluru or Kakadu in Australia with people who live that landscape, then you can at least delude yourself that you might have the beginnings of understanding what is going on in such acculturated landscapes without monuments. They are what we might call 'narrative' or 'oral landscapes', for they are full of stories told and told again by societies without the written word. We in the West had such stories too, and therefore such landscapes; but we have denigrated folk-lore in our scientific rationalism and have consequently lost our associated landscapes. Perhaps our sympathy for other peoples', be it on the green-brown bush around Uluru or on the Painted Desert of Arizona, paradoxically stems from a sense of that loss (*cf*. Layton 1989).

The concept of cultural landscape links not just thought but action about these curious places, places to be curious about and places which affect us in curious ways; they are places where we can be aware of relationships between humanity and time and between humanity and nature; a cultural landscape should speak to us of past and future. By definition, a cultural landscape has to have a past; to be of any value, it has to have a future, most importantly for our successors to contemplate tomorrow. So a cultural landscape is not just an idea; it should also be something of practical use. We as a species need communal reference points, to check where we are going to as well as coming from; as individuals, we similarly need our own little bits of heritage to give us personal identity and act as our guiding star.

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