

Research Paper 33

**Landscapes, Texts and
Scriptural Imperialism**

James Kneale

Department of Geography
University of Exeter

May 1998

Geography Laboratory
Arts Building C
University of Sussex
Falmer
Brighton BN1 9QN

ISBN 1 874465 33 9

£4.00

Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	2
Landscapes: Texts Without Readers?	3
Landscape as Text: Post-Structuralist Geographies	3
Geographical Interpretation and Theories of Language	4
Language, Landscape and Power	5
The Problem with 'Naturalization'	7
Rhetorical Power	8
Interpretation and Scriptural Imperialism	10
Conclusions: Revaluing Texts and Readers	12
References	15

Abstract

The textualisation of landscape can be seen as part of geography's 'cartographic anxiety'. Faced with a plurality of meanings, geographers have attempted to ignore the readers of landscape-texts in order to re-assert their critical authority over interpretation. The paper demonstrates how ideas of the 'naturalisation' of ideology by landscape rest upon two flawed notions: *a priori* assumptions about the power of language and the gullibility of the reader; and a particularly negative interpretation of the power of rhetoric and metaphor. Despite its roots in post-structuralist literary theory, this approach silences the reader in favour of the critic: a practice that Michel de Certeau calls 'scriptural imperialism'.

Landscapes, Texts, and Scriptural Imperialism

Landscapes: Texts Without Readers?

Facing critiques of its project of mapping and knowing space, contemporary geography appears to be suffering from a "cartographic anxiety" (Gregory, 1994, page 6). Since part of this anxiety stems from increasing geographical interest in literary theory, and especially post-structuralism, it may seem paradoxical to argue, as I do in this paper, that post-structuralist literary theory has been recruited by some geographers to 'domesticate' space and to make it readable again. This has largely been achieved through the silencing of a particular figure: that of the reader.

Geographers have little interest in the reader or consumer of landscapes or places. However, while humanistic and cultural materialist studies can perhaps be excused for this since reading is not central to their theoretical foundations, the same cannot be said of post-structuralist geographies. The reader is central to post-structuralism, and consequently to the work of those geographers who have suggested that we consider landscapes as texts. However, I would like to argue that while geographers are becoming increasingly interested in the textual model of landscape, they have largely ignored the readers of these texts. The existence of the 'real' reader, the person who actively creates meaning through their contact with the text, has remained ignored. This, I will argue, is not merely an oversight. Rather, it stems from the power of the academy to determine not only which texts are worth reading, but also how they should be read.

In this paper I review some of the key contributions to the study of 'landscape-as-text' in order to present a critique of its main assumptions. Firstly, the reader is largely considered only as a theoretical abstraction or is ignored altogether; secondly, readers are presumed to be unproblematically influenced by the texts they read, whether they are novels, works of art, or material landscapes. In addition, these studies rely upon a theory of ideology which is, I argue, simplistic, mechanical, and at odds with a post-structuralist approach. Having established this, I conclude by examining the role of the critic in producing the figure of the reader as a passive 'dupe', and suggest some alternatives which work with, rather than against, the reader.

Landscape as Text: Post-structuralist Geographies

...one might very roughly periodize the history of modern literary theory in three stages: a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years. The reader has always been the most under-privileged of this trio - strangely, because without him or her there would be no literary texts at all... For literature to happen, the reader is quite as vital as the author.
(Eagleton, 1983, page 74)

Theories of reading were confused or non-existent before the advent of broadly 'post-structuralist' geographies. Douglas Pocock, for example, could not decide whether the reader's interpretations were "unique" (1981, page 11) or whether "Literary truth has a universality" (pages 11-12). The first hints of a post-structuralist approach to landscape can perhaps be seen in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels' introduction to *The Iconography of Landscape* (1988), mixed in with structuralist metaphors of depth and 'layers' of meaning. It is only with the

publication of James and Nancy Duncan's '(Re)reading the landscape' in 1988 that we can see the foundations being laid for the landscape-as-text approach. Key works which followed include James Duncan's *The City as Text* (1990); Jeff Hopkins' 'West Edmonton Mall: Landscape of myths and elsewhere', (1990); Trevor Barnes and James Duncan's *Writing Worlds* (1992); and James Duncan and David Ley's *Place/Culture/Representation* (1993). Since geography's cultural turn seems to have largely involved post-structuralism, there are obviously many other works which could be considered here, especially studies of metaphor in geographical writing (e.g. Barnes, 1992; Pratt, 1992; Smith, 1996; Wolff, 1993). I have chosen to focus on the authors listed above because of their interest in the application of post-structuralist literary theory to the interpretation of landscapes.

So what constitutes these post-structuralist geographies? To paraphrase an extremely rich field of study, post-structuralist literary theory rests upon one key idea: that language cannot simply refer to or reflect reality. Geographical writing does not hold up a mirror to the world. After the relationship between sign and referent had been displayed to be arbitrary by Saussure, it followed that the real world could not be captured in writing. Instead of an apparently stable external world, all we have are *texts*, which are capable of being interpreted in countless ways because they are *polysemic* (hold multiple truths). We do not make sense of the world by comparing the truth claims of language and 'reality', but by joining texts together - through *intertextuality*. As a consequence of this, we must be aware that our writing is nothing more than a set of representations, and that our constructions of reality are bound up in a set of power relations. The key insight of post-structuralist feminist and post-colonial literary theory is that writing is a political act.

I wish to discuss the work of cultural geographers who have taken up these ideas by first explaining how they reject *referential*, *objectivist*, or *mimetic* theories of language, and to then discuss their conceptions of the *power* that landscapes have over their consumers.

Geographical Interpretation and Theories of Language

Duncan and Duncan's '(Re)reading the landscape' (1988) starts with the premise that "literary theory provides us with ways to examine the text-like quality of landscapes, and to see them as transformations of ideologies" (page 117). Their idea of the text is based upon the post-structuralist critique of *referential* theories of language, where language is held to unproblematically refer to the real. Following Barthes, they stress the role of the reader in creating meaning from intertextual associations rather than by reference to the real. This was developed by James Duncan's study of the role of landscape in constituting social meaning in nineteenth century Kandy. Rival readings of the 'city-text' represent ideological and social struggles over the symbolic meaning of place and the social order.

...the physical form of the city constituted a text which was in turn a transformation of the texts that informed the discursive field of Kandy kingship. (1990, page 6)

These attacks on 'referential' theories of meaning are echoed in Trevor Barnes and James Duncan's introduction to *Writing Worlds* (1992b). Their critique of 'objectivism' has three consequences. Firstly, writing reflects not reality but *other writing*, through intertextuality. Secondly, "writing about worlds reveals as much about ourselves as it does about the world represented" and is part of a set of wider power relationships which constitute the producer's authority (page 3). Thirdly, "in writing worlds, we must pay attention to our rhetoric, as well as the rhetoric of others" (page 3): a call for reflexivity.

Discussing the nature of texts brings the reader into the frame of interpretation in an interesting way:

...the meaning of a text is unstable, dependent upon the wide range of interpretations brought to bear upon it by different readers. ...these interpreters are not free to make of the text what they like, but are subject to discursive practices of specific textual communities. (page 6)

Textual communities', borrowed from the work of Stock (1983; 1993), are defined as "social groups that cluster around a shared reading of a text" (Duncan and Duncan, 1988, page 117). This notion allows the social to creep back into post-structuralist interpretation. However, Barnes and Duncan's conception of society has also been textualized. Therefore "the social-life-as-text metaphor is easily applicable to landscape because it too is a social and cultural production" (page 6). If the social and cultural are textual, and the landscape is socially and culturally produced, then landscape must also be a text. I will develop a critique of rhetoric later but for now I want to suggest that it is significant that Barnes and Duncan do not recognise that metaphors can create meanings which may in fact be utterly arbitrary. In other words, it seems pointless to 'prove' the similarity between society and the text: all this demonstrates is the power of the metaphor that makes this equivalence possible.

Duncan and Ley's introduction to *Place/Culture/Representation* (1993b) situates the now familiar concepts of 'referential meaning' and 'objectivism' within the history of Anglo-American human geography and identify "four major modes of representation" within the discipline (page 2). The first two - "descriptive fieldwork based on observation" and "a form of mimesis loosely based upon positivist science" - attempt to represent the world mimetically, mimicking or reflecting reality and refusing to problematize the act of depiction (page 2). The other two approaches - postmodernism and hermeneutic interpretation - are critically opposed to such a project (page 3). Duncan and Ley's discussion of the reader - which draws upon Iser (1989) - is perhaps the most useful theorisation yet offered in geography, moving towards a less mechanical theory of the production and consumption of meaning:

The world in the text is continually compared to the worlds outside the text in order to see what the former reveals about the latter and as a 'test' of the plausibility of the former. (pages 9-10)

I will discuss the value and problems of such a theorisation later, but it is important to note that while post-structuralism places the reader centre-stage, it has taken five years for him or her to get more than a token mention from these cultural geographers. In fact, of all these contributions, only Duncan (1990) actually takes the trouble to study readers' interpretations. This is, I would argue, due to their conception of the power of textual landscapes, which I now turn to.

Language, Landscape and Power

Using a term which we will encounter again, Duncan and Duncan suggest that landscapes "naturalize" ways of thinking about the world, and that the job of the critic is to "denaturalize" them:

If landscapes are texts which are read, interpreted according to an ingrained cultural framework of interpretation, *if they are often read 'inattentively' at a practical or nondiscursive level*, then they may be inculcating their readers with a set of notions about how the society is organized: *and their readers may be largely unaware of this.* (1988, page 123, emphasis added)

Duncan and Duncan suggest that landscapes (and their politics) are taken for granted because they are "so tangible, so natural, so familiar" (page 123). Although they qualify this by saying

that landscapes do not necessarily naturalize social relations, and suggest that this process can be challenged by groups outside the academy, they argue that "denaturalization in this and other realms is an important task of the academic as critical theorist" (page 125).

Seeking to explain landscape's role in the reproduction of ideology, Duncan (1990) expands upon the concept of 'naturalization', asking a question which is central to this whole body of work: *how* do landscapes signify and naturalize meaning? The answer lies in what Duncan calls 'the rhetoric of landscape'. Rhetorical studies aim to identify the tropes (metaphor, metonym, synecdoche and others) which encode meaning in a text in such a way that it convinces readers. He argues that this rhetoric is ideological, fixing or normalising meanings which then become taken-for-granted. Landscape, as a concrete, anonymous text, is a powerful channel for these ideologies because it is "an objectifier *par excellence*":

[A landscapes] history as a social construction is unexamined. It is, therefore, as unwittingly read as it is unwittingly written. (page 19)

Barnes and Duncan elaborate on this in two ways. Firstly, they draw upon Foucault to suggest that "it is their association with institutions that legitimates the 'truths' that they produce" (page 9). Secondly, meanings are naturalised through rhetoric, especially metaphor. Barnes and Duncan define the latter as a trope which "asserts a similarity between two or more different things" (page 10). The contrast between the different terms creates "all manner of effects", from laughter to "the creative spark" (page 10). Once metaphors have become accepted, they die, ceasing to have any further transformative effects; they can then appeal to objectivity because they are taken for granted.

These points can also be seen in Jeffrey Hopkins' study of the West Edmonton Mall and the ideological effect of its "*spatial* strategy of 'simulated elsewhere'" (1990, page 2, emphasis in original). Hopkins' semiotic and iconic interpretation is similar to the rhetorical strategy employed by the Duncans, by Barnes and several of the contributors to *Writing Worlds*. However, Hopkins' conception of the dominant ideology behind this simulation of elsewhere-ness sees it as a cover for the real work of shifting commodities. Hopkins presents a rewriting of media studies 'effects theory': having fun at the mall, it seems, is merely a sugar coating which disguises the bitter pill of consumption. For example, Hopkins admits that the malls' patrons are not fooled by this elsewhere-ness but concludes that this makes them "temporal and spatial hypocrites engaged in play" (page 13). Damned if you are fooled, damned if you are not.

In their critique of mimesis, Duncan and Ley argue that it conceals the social construction of language (page 4). Tellingly, they draw upon Barthes' structuralist arguments in *Mythologies* (1972) to strengthen their claim that mimesis naturalises social relations. However, they concede that this mimesis is constantly subverted; feminists and post-colonialist critics have added to the critique of mimesis by underlining its collusion with patriarchy and imperialism. The idea that 'ordinary' readers *outside* the academy might recognise that this reality is constructed is not considered, though it seems to me to be almost self-evident.

Denis Cosgrove and Mona Domosh's paper (1993) examines the authority of the author and the text and uses the concept of hegemony to account for the power of representations:

Theories of hegemony suggest that [a struggle over meaning] occurs through a process of naturalizing specific discourses, suppressing others and thus legitimizing uneven distributions of power. (page 29)

As usual, the authors neglect to explain how this naturalization and suppression is achieved - are some discourses natural simply because they are linked to hegemonic interests? Apart from this, the collection largely avoids the question of representational power. Rhetoric is also largely

absent, apart from the landscape-text metaphor and its derivatives (for example, landscape as spectacle or theatre, see Daniels and Cosgrove, 1993). As a result, the papers in *Place/Culture/Representation* are generally less extravagant in their assumptions about texts and discourses, though the question of textual power is still answered by references to 'naturalization' and 'association'.

From my review of the 'landscape as text' literature, it would seem that the most important question raised by this approach is 'how do landscapes communicate ideologies to those who view or read them?' Most of the authors discussed above would probably suggest that the answer lies with 'naturalization'. In the next sections I offer a critique of both 'naturalization' and rhetoric.

The Problem with 'Naturalization'

I would suggest that the concepts of representational power used by these authors are simply forms of the 'effects theory' which plagues media criticism. Where conservative effects theory - exemplified by debates over the power of television or film to corrupt the young - assumes that cultural texts make deviants of their consumers, an equally influential left-liberal version argues that hegemonic ideologies promote forms of false consciousness. Aspects of this 'theory' persist in post-structuralist landscape studies, and it seems that we have yet to produce a theory of landscape meaning which escapes the crude determinations of 'naturalization'. Landscapes are assumed to naturalize social relations and fix hegemonic meanings in three ways: by *association*; through *rhetoric*; and through *over-familiarity*. I will examine each idea in turn, before returning to the idea of rhetoric to illustrate some of the problems of the idea of naturalization.

Landscape-texts can be powerful through *association* because they are linked to institutions and sites of power: science, government, law, and so on. However, must we assume that these legitimating sites and discourses are always accepted by those who experience them? The mechanisms by which this power is transmitted from source to landscape to reader are presumed to be infallible. In fact, this power-by-association theory still does not convincingly demonstrate how this power is produced, or how it is used in practice. Despite the references to Foucault, then, these authors are a long way from developing a 'modest' sociology of the mechanisms of textual influence. Indeed, I would suggest that such an analysis is vital, but that these geographers are not looking in the right place. And what of Michel de Certeau's tacticians (1984), whose everyday practices are designed to escape these Foucauldian strategies?

The *rhetoric* of landscape seems to work in one of two ways: by generalising from a particular example, or by substituting one thing for another. The first establishes a *metonymic equivalence*, as a part is exchanged for the whole, or vice versa; the second creates a *metaphoric equivalence* as two different terms are involved in a process of substitution (Lodge, 1977). Again, the idea that rhetoric possesses a generalising power denies the social and contextual nature of language (cf. Volosinov, 1973). Can we be certain that these generalisations and equivalences will not be challenged, or simply taken for what they are, exaggerations and plays on language?

The idea of *over-familiarity* suggests that landscapes are so concrete and taken for granted that they successfully hide their own constructedness. Similarly, when metaphors become over-used, they cease to be shocking, settling into cliché. These dead metaphors no longer draw attention to themselves and are therefore subliminally persuasive. Again, this idea rests upon a specific conception of the communication of meaning.

The theory of power which underpins these three ideas is based upon what media studies critics would term a 'transmission model' of culture: meanings are unproblematically transmitted to the reader, who simply accepts them. It is also interesting that Duncan and Duncan (1988) use the metaphor of "uncovering" meaning, and that in 1993 Duncan and Ley could still cite Barthes'

Mythologies - a classic *structuralist* text - as support for the 'naturalization' thesis. The notion of power that these authors seem to be working with is, I would suggest, a post-structuralist analysis bolted onto an earlier structuralist theory of meaning. The task of the keen-eyed and specially trained critic is to uncover the *real* meaning of the text, so that its harmful ideological content can be neutralised. The tension between the ideas of 'representation' and 'textual truth' hardly needs to be emphasised, yet it remains at the core of this approach. It should be pointed out that Cosgrove and Domosh (1993) criticise the Duncans for assuming that ideology can be "unmasked" (and see Gregory, 1994, page 145).

Not only is this theory extremely simplistic and pessimistic, it also rests upon a conception of the reader as a passive 'dupe'. For the Duncans and others, the goal of the critic is to 'denaturalize' the landscape; the possibility of a non-academic making this kind of challenge is rarely addressed. Though the reader is supposed to be the privileged site of post-structuralist criticism, this approach actually constructs *two* readers: the critic and the dupe. Only the former is granted the active role suggested by post-structuralism.

In addition, it is assumed that meanings are either accepted or rejected. Ideology, it seems, either works or fails, and its success is dependent upon the nature of the reader. When it works (on the 'unwitting' non-academics) it is utterly effective and creates some form of false consciousness. When it does not (in the case of the critic), its ideological nature is instantly visible and easily 'denaturalised'. I feel that this kind of analysis relies upon *a priori* assumptions about the power of culture.

Rhetorical Power

These problems are especially obvious in those works which use a rhetorical analysis. I want to demonstrate this through an examination of a central text for many of these cultural geographers: Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse* (1978). While White's point that all discourse contains tropes or rhetorical forms is often cited by James Duncan and others to emphasise the importance of rhetoric, the elaboration of this argument is not usually addressed. White argues that the study of tropes can help us to understand the ways in which people make sense of the world, because they represent a turning away from one possible meaning towards another. These turns are part of the practice of understanding:

Understanding is a process of rendering the unfamiliar... familiar; of removing it from the domain of things felt to be "exotic" and unclassified into one or another domain of experience encoded adequately enough to be felt to be humanly useful, nonthreatening, or simply known by association. This process of understanding can only be tropological in nature, for what is involved in the rendering of the unfamiliar into the familiar is a troping that is generally figurative. (page 5)

To use a pertinent example, geographers have troped their understanding of the term 'landscape' away from one meaning ('material object') to another ('text'). Perhaps the metaphor changed because geographers felt unhappy with the idea of a stable, concrete landscape. Seeking an analogy for landscape which would fit their new preoccupation with polysemy and interpretation, they decided that this newly unfamiliar landscape was actually like something very close to their hearts: the written text. This is a figurative troping, in White's terms, because it involves a representation of the landscape through a new metaphor.

It is White's conception of this "process of understanding" which I wish to criticise. He writes that when we attempt to render the unfamiliar familiar, we make propositions which often take the form "this *is* that". This is the form of metaphor, "without which our transition from a state of ignorance to one of practical understanding would be unthinkable" (page 20). Even if

we disagree with the metaphor's claim, it can still demonstrate how understanding is reached: "it gains its effect as an illumination, if not of reality, then of the relationship between words and things" (page 21). I have used this insight to suggest the reasons for the origin of the 'landscape as text' metaphor above. However, I am unconvinced by White's model of the practice of understanding, and to develop this I want to discuss his rhetorical analysis of A. J. P. Taylor's historical writings.

White demonstrates that the rhetoric of Taylor's prose "serves as a 'code' by which the reader is invited to assume a certain attitude towards the facts and the interpretation of them" (page 107). He argues that there is a kind of hidden structure in the cited passage, "a level of secondary meaning" which organises the narrative to produce the maximum effect in the reader (page 110). None of this is particularly controversial; White criticises mimetic representation and argues that there is a poetics to non-literary writing. Where I disagree is with the assumptions he makes about the 'encoding' of this 'deep structure' and its power to convince. Having made his points about Taylor's style, he shows that it contains "dead metaphors", which "can, in fact, be comforting, having the effect of reinforcing views already held and serving to familiarize phenomena that otherwise would remain exotic or alien" (page 114). This parallels the idea of 'over-familiarization' discussed above. In addition, White sees the reader as the passive recipient of coded meanings:

[The secondary] figurative level is produced by a constructive process, poetic in nature, which prepares the reader of the text more or less subconsciously to receive both the description of the facts and their explanation as plausible, on the one side, and as adequate to one another, on the other. (page 110)

This position influences White's theory of understanding. While he recognises the active, creative nature of the understanding process, he also sees dead metaphors as "comforting" and "reinforcing" to the reader, who is being prepared "more or less subconsciously" to believe the author through the textual tropes. There is no indication that the reader might be able to resist (unless he or she is a critic like White), nor of a more complex formulation which would allow the reader to be 'in two minds'. This theory of rhetoric sees language as effecting instant changes in the reader's understanding through the operations of the text.

White's conceptualisation of understanding rests upon the idea that we understand the world by "rendering the unfamiliar into the familiar". I am in complete agreement with this, but those geographers who have used his work seem to see this rendering as a kind of loss. By making the strange into the known, by classifying and naming the Other, we *automatically* create, it seems, an impoverished image of the world. However, this only follows if we assume that in every case understanding will be determined by hegemonic discourses, and I find this difficult to believe. If we move away from the idea that understanding necessarily involves a *flattening* of our experience of the world, then we might be prepared to investigate the empirical workings of this process of understanding. For de Certeau, for example, the practice of making sense is a vital aspect of everyday life, and need not necessarily reproduce hegemonic ideologies (1984).

In fact, White's rather pessimistic theory of understanding rests upon a particular interpretation of metaphor. His formulation of the proposition "this *is* that" assumes that one term is neatly transformed into the other, so that 'landscape' *becomes* 'text'. This is based upon a theory of *equivalence*, where the two terms are considered to be synonymous once the metaphor has been created. However, if we compare this with structuralist and formalist theories of metaphor, particularly the work of Roman Jakobson, we find a very different idea of the relationship between the two terms, one which stresses the *tension* between them. This tension makes metaphors productive precisely *because* they say that one thing is actually another.

Drawing upon this work, David Lodge (1977) argues that a metaphorical substitution requires a bigger 'jump' in understanding than a metonymical one. Cultural forms or styles which rely on metaphor (drama, poetry, the modernist novel) constantly draw attention to their constructedness. This is because *the narrative and the metaphor are in tension*:

The greater the distance (existentially, conceptually, affectively) between [the old and new terms], the more powerful will be the semantic effect... but the greater, also, will be the disturbance to the relationships of contiguity between items in the discourse and therefore to realistic illusion. (page 111)

In other words, the more unfamiliar the metaphor, the more it stands out from the narrative, and the less convincing it will be.

It is obvious that Lodge's theory of the *power* of rhetoric is similar to White's, but I want to concentrate on the *contrasts* between these theories of metaphor. Lodge reminds us that metaphors can be strange, perhaps even shocking, and this is a useful corrective to the ideas of White and those geographers who follow him. My own position would be that we should not take metaphors for granted in either of these two ways. They are elements of language which can be accepted, transformed, or rejected, and the particular ways in which readers perform these activities cannot be predicted from an analysis of the text.

I hope that I have established that these theories of power in language - power-by-association, rhetoric, and familiarity - are all based upon two flawed premises. Firstly, they depend upon the passivity of the reader, who is unable, except in the most obvious cases, to resist ideological messages. Secondly, they create a rather rigid conception of the effects of this power. Meanings are unproblematically transmitted and either accepted or resisted. If we are prepared to move away from these two ideas, then we must accept that the reader is not simply an ideological dupe, but an active producer of meaning; and this means that every reading must always be a transformation of some kind. Readers make sense of texts in ways which seem sensible to them, drawing upon their experiences of other texts, other social and cultural situations. Meanings are therefore always being made and remade, not simply passed on or abandoned.

Interpretation and Scriptural Imperialism

Why do so many of these geographers assume that texts are powerful and readers so passive? I would like to suggest two linked reasons for this. Firstly, following Gillian Rose (1994), I think it may partly be due to an *a priori* view of culture as a sphere strictly divided into hegemonic and subordinate domains. Rose argues that Gramsci's influence has left us with what she terms a "binary model of culture" (page 47), divided into the hegemonic and the counter-hegemonic. While this division seems useful, it strengthens the idea of 'naturalization':

...ideology is used to refer to the appropriation of meaning by dominant social groups; certain values are rendered commonsense and this process of discursive naturalization legitimates the social hierarchy by obscuring its oppressive social relations. (page 46)

This throws some light on the conception of power I have criticised above. If landscapes are the products of the powerful, and the latter are always able to convince the subordinate group, then it follows that landscapes must be utterly convincing. Syllogistic reasoning like this has led to an assumption that 'naturalization' is utterly and instantly effective in transmitting ideology. In addition, this makes a text simply a conduit for hegemonic power; as Brosseau suggests, this conception of language sees it as *transparent* (1994). Are landscapes really nothing more than channels for power? This would imply that post-structuralist geographers have ignored the formal

properties of texts, as well as the role of the author and reader. Their interpretations are not studies of texts at all, but of *ideologies* which are carried unchanged from producers to consumers.

My second argument is that this bears the traces of what de Certeau provocatively calls "scriptural imperialism" - the power of writing over reading (1984, page 169). Scriptural imperialism is a strategy operating out of the institution of the academy which is consistently used to characterise consumers as a mass which "is *imprinted* by and like the text which is imposed on it" (page 167, emphasis in original).

This idea of readers as subjects produced by texts can be seen in the few attempts that geographers have made to consider the reader, which remain rooted in a method which *speculates* as to how readers might respond to texts. The 'speculative' model involves the critic reading the text in such a way as to construct an idea of the reader's responses (Morley, 1992). While the work of cultural critics like Mulvey (1975) and literary theorists like Iser (1989) focuses on the theoretical importance of reading, they are still unwilling to engage with its empirical reality. In a sense, the speculative critic is like an archaeologist who attempts to reconstruct the nature of prehistoric cultures from their artefacts alone; it is almost as if we are examining the text to establish the practices of a dead people.

This leads cultural geographers to some strange conclusions, as Jacquelin Burgess has noted with respect to studies of 'the postmodern landscape':

The analyst remains in the dominant position of telling readers what these landscapes mean for the people who purchase and live in them. (1990, page 140)

In summary, while the reader is central to post-structuralist thinking, in practice this interpretative strategy can only construct the reader theoretically, reducing the complexities of reading to broad generalisations.

But this is not an oversight; it is clearly linked to the strategies of interpretation. Rose finds the landscape as text metaphor paradoxical:

The meaning of any landscape/text is open to interpretation and contestation, they [Barnes and Duncan] imply; the author of the landscape/text is dead. But then I find their stress on the *fixity* of the landscape/text puzzling. (1993, page 100, emphasis added)

This 'fixity' is the 'naturalization' discussed above, which Rose sees as an aspect of the masculinist and rational nature of geographical knowledge:

I suggest that the notion of solidity is necessary in order to imply the possibility of certain knowledge about landscape. For in all this work the only representations of landscape which seem able to retain their interpretive certainty (overtly at least) are *those of the geographers themselves*. (page 100, emphasis added)

In the midst of the web-like complexity of signs that make up texts, only the post-structuralist critic is able to make any sense of the world they represent. This frees the (masculine) geographer

from the interpretive rules that he applies to the texts of others, and renders him invincible as *an author* - all-seeing and all-knowing. He can reveal the contestation over another landscape image, and in doing so establishes the acuity and insight of his own reading. (page 100, emphasis added)

Similarly, Derek Gregory sees this approach as a kind of 'domestication' of postmodernism, based upon the "two meta-theoretical devices" of "interpretive stasis and interpretive privilege" (page 146). The text is frozen by the critic's dissection, and the interpretation is fixed by his or her authority. Gregory concludes that

Duncan and Geertz assure us, and in a conspicuously therapeutic gesture I think *re-assure* us, that it is possible to *make* sense of those texts, to *make* them mean. (page 150)

Ironically, the textual model of interpretation has given geographers a way of dealing with the cartographic anxieties originally stirred up by post-structuralist literary theory, a new strategy devoted to the old ends of producing a single, fixed reading.

There are other similarities between textual interpretation of landscape and de Certeau's description of the relationship between writing and reading. In particular there is a strong sense in many of these studies that the critic is a *legitimate* reader, while others are simply consumers.

In spite of the work which has uncovered an autonomy of the practice of reading underneath scriptural imperialism, a *de facto* situation has been created by more than three centuries of history. The social and technical functioning of contemporary culture hierarchizes these two activities. To write is to produce the text; to read is to receive it from someone else without putting one's own mark on it, without remaking it. (De Certeau, 1984, page 169)

In this sense, critics are also writers because they produce new texts in the form of legitimate readings. This is particularly ironic considering that the author has been pronounced to be 'dead'; perhaps Barthes (1977) was simply announcing a coup. In fact it is the critic who establishes a stable and proper meaning by exercising this power through the operations of criticism:

The use made by the book by privileged readers constitutes it as a secret of which they are the 'true' interpreters. It interposes a frontier between the text and its readers that can be crossed only if one has a passport delivered by these official readers... By its very nature available to a plural reading, the text becomes a cultural weapon, a private hunting reserve, the pretext for a law that legitimizes as 'literal' the interpretation given by *socially* authorized professionals and intellectuals... (de Certeau, page 171, emphasis in original)

De Certeau's idea of the critic's 'passport' suggests that this legitimacy can be earned by the ordinary reader if he or she follows the approved practices. We can therefore start to put together a picture of the operations of scriptural imperialism as it applies to critical readings. The 'policing' of readings is at its most evident in interpretations of canonical literature, but as critical interest in the popular grows it seems increasingly likely that readers will need passports to legitimate their consumption of other cultural forms. It certainly seems that the everyday practice of landscape interpretation has become a private hunting reserve. If landscapes *can* be read as texts, which seems likely, perhaps it is time that we listened to those readers whose interpretive practices are not sanctioned by the institution of criticism.

Conclusions: Revaluing Texts and Readers

I would like to end by offering some alternatives to the textual model of criticism I have outlined above. This approach has produced some fine studies, particularly Duncan's examination of Kandy, which situates texts and their readings within a wider discursive context. Duncan has also stressed that "the [textual] model requires in-depth empirical research to work out the many cultural and historical specificities of the relationship between landscape and other texts within each culture" (1995, page 415). However, the 'landscape as text' metaphor has, as I hope I have shown, important implications for our understanding of texts, language, power, and ideology. We need to re-evaluate the nature of texts, since many post-structuralist geographies see them as simply transparent carriers of ideology. We also need to recognise that the meanings of landscapes or other representations of place are produced by networks of different actors, and that these meanings are constantly transformed in their "peregrinations... about the social world" (Chartier, 1994, page x).

First of all, there are problems with the ubiquity of the textual metaphor. Authors who attempt to render everything - landscapes, social life, the world - into texts transform a particular form of language into a universal one, and therefore "promote a generalized difference which is actually homogenizing" (Thrift, 1994, page 109). Along with Thrift's point that it is possible to consider some things ("the unconscious.... the memory of the body, sexual desire", page 110) as non-textual, it is also worth saying that not all texts are alike. Marc Brosseau (1994, 1995) suggests that the internal organisation of texts may constrain the reader's interpretations. As a result, it might be more productive of us to re-examine the structural and formal characteristics of texts beyond their rhetoric, and to see the text as actively producing meaning through its internal organisation rather than the ideologies it supposedly carries:

Such an active view of the text does not seek to undermine the active role of the reader... on the other hand, it does not subscribe to a conception of an autonomous and self-celebrating reader who transforms the text into a mere pre-text. (page 91)

I would agree with Brosseau that the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1984, and see Volosinov, 1973) is particularly useful in re-evaluating the text as more than an inert and transparent carrier of meaning. This does not mean a return to the assumptions of formalism or structuralism, merely an attempt to take the text seriously in its own right.

In terms of re-establishing the links between readers, texts and authors, there are two alternatives. The first involves attempting to improve upon the speculative model by drawing upon increasingly sophisticated work on reader-response criticism (Tompkins, 1980; Fish, 1980; Flynn and Schweickart, 1986). However, this work still suffers from an emphasis on the theoretical role of the reader, rather than the empirical practices of making sense of texts.

The second path would involve attempting to establish what it is that readers *do* with texts: an investigation of reading practice and the contexts of consumption. De Certeau's discussion of the operations of scriptural imperialism represent a sound base for this kind of investigation, though care should be taken not to over-emphasise the freedom of the reader so that "the text is simply dissolved into its readings" (Morley, 1992, page 27; c.f. Fiske, 1987). Writers like Roger Chartier (1987; 1989a; 1989b; 1989c; 1994), Robert Darnton (1986), and Henri-Jean Martin (1994) have begun to establish a history of the practices of reading, their relationship with the text, and the consequences for the production of meaning.

Perhaps the most extensive empirical investigations of reading practice have taken the form of 'audience studies', which began by investigating Stuart Hall's ideas on the 'encoding' and 'decoding' of media texts (1980) and which has produced several important theoretical and empirical studies (Ang, 1985; Brunsdon and Morley, 1978; Morley, 1980, 1992; Radway, 1984, 1988). This work has offered a more sociological slant to textual analysis, balancing the power of texts to constrain interpretations with the reader's active role. Many of these ideas have been adopted by Jacquelin Burgess and her co-workers at University College London, in an attempt to consider both the production and consumption of environmental meanings (Burgess, 1990; Burgess, Harrison and Maiteny, 1991; Burgess and Wood, 1988). This work represents a strong alternative to the landscape-as-text approach, and aims to gather readings of places through qualitative methods.

Of course, there is a danger of simply replacing one form of interpretive 'fix' with another. Not only should we not mistake the readings of others for anything more than contingent, local, forms of understanding, but we must be careful not to re-impose our own fixed critical interpretations on them. The challenge, it seems to me, is to establish the practices by which readers make sense of landscapes without tearing them out of their wider contexts. This is not easy, as de Certeau makes clear. Reading remains elusive because researchers ignore consumption

and emphasise production (writing); because they are more interested in "*what* is used, not the *ways* of using" (page 35); because consumption is always context-dependent and therefore difficult to separate out from the other practices of everyday life; and, perhaps most importantly, because consumers employ tactics to keep these practices hidden from the strategic prying of social scientists and others.

The empirical investigation of reading is not, therefore, an easy option; like all ethnography it faces important practical and ethical problems. However, this challenge is worth facing if we wish to avoid the rather dubious assumptions and generalisations of the 'landscape as text' approach. Criticising the naturalizing power of rhetoric without examining the mechanisms by which meanings are established is a major weakness of this method. What makes the situation even more serious is that this model is founded upon the dismissal of reading and the operations of scriptural imperialism which colonise the space of reading with the productions of the literary elite.

References

- Ang, I, 1985 *Watching Dallas: soap opera and the melodramatic imagination* (Routledge, London and New York)
- Bakhtin M, 1984 *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* edited and translated C Emerson (Manchester University Press, Manchester)
- Barnes T, 1992, "Reading the texts of theoretical economic geography: the role of physical and biological metaphors", in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape*, Eds T Barnes, J Duncan (Routledge, London and New York) pp 118-35
- Barnes T, Duncan J, Eds 1992a *Writing Worlds: Discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape* (Routledge, London and New York)
- Barnes T, Duncan J, 1992b, "Introduction: Writing worlds" in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape*, Eds T Barnes, J Duncan (Routledge, London and New York) pp 1-17.
- Barthes R, 1972 *Mythologies* selected and translated by Annette Lavers (Cape, London)
- Barthes R, 1977 "The death of the author", in *Image, Music, Text* selected and translated S Heath (Fontana, London)
- Brunsdon C, Morley D, 1978 *Everyday Television: 'Nationwide'* (BFI, London)
- Burgess J, 1990, "The Production and Consumption of Environmental Meanings in the Mass Media: A research agenda for the 1990s" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS **15** 139-161
- Brosseau M, 1994, "Geography's Literature", *Progress in Human Geography* **18** 333-353
- Brosseau M, 1995, "The city in textual form: *Manhattan Transfer's* New York" *Ecumene* **2** 89-114
- Burgess J, Harrison C, Maiteny P, 1991 "Contested Meanings: The consumption of news about nature conservation" *Media, Culture and Society* **13** 499-519
- Burgess J, Wood, P, 1988 "Decoding Docklands: Place strategies and decision-making strategies of the small firm" in *Qualitative Methods in Human Geography* Eds J Eyles and D Smith (Polity Press, Cambridge) pp 94-117
- Chartier R, 1987 *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* translated L Cochrane (Princeton University Press, Princeton)
- Chartier R, 1989a, Ed *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton University Press, Princeton)

- Chartier R, 1989b, "Leisure and sociability: reading aloud in early modern Europe", in *Urban Life in the Renaissance* Eds S Zimmerman and R Weissman (University of Delaware Press, Newark, and Associated University Press, London and Toronto), pp 105-20
- Chartier R, 1989c, "The practical impact of writing", in *Passions of the Renaissance* Ed R Chartier, translated A Goldhammer (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London) pp 111-59
- Chartier R, 1994, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* translated L Cochrane (Polity Press, Cambridge)
- Cosgrove D, Daniels S, Eds 1988, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)
- Cosgrove D, Domosh M, 1993, "Author and Authority: Writing the new cultural geography", in *Place/Culture/Representation* Eds J Duncan, D Ley (Routledge, London and New York) pp 25-38
- Daniels S, Cosgrove D, 1993, "Spectacle and text", in *Place/Culture/Representation* Eds J Duncan, D Ley (Routledge, London and New York) pp 57-77
- Darnton R, 1986, "First steps towards a history of reading" *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23 5-30
- De Certeau M, 1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life* translated S Rendall (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London)
- Duncan J, 1990 *The City as Text: The politics of landscape interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)
- Duncan J, 1995, "Landscape geography, 1993-94" *Progress in Human Geography* 19 414-422
- Duncan J, Duncan N, 1988, "(Re)reading the landscape" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6 117-126.
- Duncan J, and Ley D Eds, 1993a *Place/Culture/Representation* (Routledge, London and New York)
- Duncan J, and Ley D, 1993b "Introduction: representing the place of culture" in *Place/Culture/Representation* Eds J Duncan, D Ley (Routledge, London and New York) 1-21.
- Eagleton T, 1983 *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford)
- Fish S, 1980 *Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press)
- Fiske J, 1987 *Television Culture* (Methuen, London and New York)

- Flynn E, Schwieckart P, Eds 1986 *Gender and Reading: essays on readers, texts, and contexts* (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London)
- Gregory D, 1994 *Geographical Imaginations* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Hall S, 1980, "Encoding/decoding" in *Culture, Media, Language* Eds S Hall, D Hobson, A Lowe, P Willis (Hutchinson, London) pp 128-138
- Hopkins J, 1990, "West Edmonton Mall: Landscape of myths and elsewhere" *The Canadian Geographer* **34**, pp 2-17
- Iser W, 1989 *Prospecting: From reader response to literary anthropology* (John Jopkins University Press, Baltimore)
- Lodge D, 1977 *The Modes of Modern Writing: metaphor, metonymy, and the typology of modern literature* (Edward Arnold, London)
- Martin H-J, 1994 *The History and Power of Writing* translated L Cochrane (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London)
- Morley D, 1980 *The Nationwide Audience* (BFI, London)
- Morley D, 1992 *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (Routledge, London and New York)
- Mulvey L, 1975, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema" *Screen* **16** 6-18
- Pratt G, 1992, "Commentary: spatial metaphors and speaking positions" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **10** 241-4
- Pocock D, 1981, "Introduction: imaginative literature and the geographer", in *Humanistic Geography and Literature: essays on the experience of place* Ed D Pocock (Croom Helm, London) pp 9-19
- Radway J, 1984 *Reading the Romance: women, patriarchy, and popular literature* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill)
- Radway J, 1988, "Reception Study: ethnography and the problems of dispersed audiences and nomadic subjects" *Cultural Studies* **2** 3-59-76
- Rose G, 1993 *Feminism and Geography: The limits of geographical knowledge* (Polity Press, Cambridge)
- Rose G, 1994, "The Cultural Politics of Place: Local representation and oppositional discourse in two films", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS **19** 46-60.

- Smith J, 1996, "Geographical Rhetoric: Modes and Tropes of Appeal", *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* **86** 1-20.
- Stock B, 1983 *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ)
- Stock B, 1993, "Reading, Community and a Sense of Place", in *Place/Culture/Representation* Eds J Duncan, D Ley, (Routledge, London and New York) pp314-328
- Thrift N, 1994, review of T Barnes and J Duncan, *Writing Worlds: Discourse, text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, *Antipode* **26** 109-11
- Tompkins J, Ed 1980 *Reader-Response Criticism: from formalism to post-structuralism* (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London)
- Volosinov V, 1973 *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* translated L Matejka, I Titunik (Seminar Press, New York)
- White H, 1978 *Tropics of Discourse: essays in cultural criticism* (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London)
- Woolf J, 1993, "On the Road Again: metaphors of travel in cultural criticism", *Cultural Studies* **7** 224-39