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# **Landscape as a provocation: reflections on moving mountains**

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## **Biographical note**

Doreen Massey is Professor of Geography at the Open University. Her interests focus on space and place, ranging from the philosophical to the political. Her books include: *Space, place and gender*, *Power-geometries and the politics of space--time*, and *For space*.

## **Abstract**

This paper opens with a story of the mobility and varied temporalities of a particular landscape and uses this to reflect on a range of issues that revolve around the different kinds of ‘grounding’ that are appealed to in socio-cultural, political and academic life. It reflects upon the relations between human and natural sciences, the nature of appeals between them, and the important, but often questionable, place within this of particular political positions. It goes on to query the role of ‘Nature’ as a grounding to place and landscape and stresses the potentially differential effectivities of contrasting temporalities --- between, for example, the temporalities of the taskspace and the temporalities of tectonics. Nonetheless, the argument continues, there are indeed provocations from the moving rocks to the nature of scientific discourse and to debates within political philosophy. It concludes with a conceptualisation of both landscape and place as events.

## **Keywords**

Space, landscape, nature, anti-foundationalism, places, localism, human/natural science relations, ‘dwelling’, temporalities, ‘the political’.

# **Landscape as a provocation: reflections on moving mountains**

## **Introduction**

The reflections that form the body of this paper take off from a moment when I was thinking about something rather different. I wanted to cite a quotation from Barbara Bender, but was unable to find the source. In exasperation, and on the last minute, I telephoned Barbara who said two things: firstly that it was a lovely quotation but secondly that she could not remember the source either. We agreed that it would go down as 'Bender (pers.comm.)'.

The quotation was this: 'Landscapes refuse to be disciplined. They make a mockery of the oppositions that we create between time (History) and space (Geography), or between nature (Science) and culture (Social Anthropology).

At the time, I was completing a book (Massey, 2005) and I shall briefly recapitulate one story from there before taking the argument off in a rather different direction.<sup>(1)</sup> The concern was 'place', a concept that I had wrestled with for a long time, on the one hand rejecting the parochialisms and the exclusivities that a commitment to place can generate and yet on the other hand wanting to hang on to a genuine appreciation of the specificity of local areas. It was in an attempt to transcend the dismal apparent opposition between those impetuses that the notion of 'a global sense of place' emerged (Massey, 1991). This aimed to evoke place as meeting place rather than as always already coherent, as open rather than bounded, as an ongoing production rather than pre-given. It aimed at an appreciation of place that did not entail parochialism. It had, however, remained entirely within the realm of human social relations, a fact I was forcefully reminded of by a friend whose sense of place was utterly bound up with

the hills amongst which she lived. It was a challenge I was pondering on a visit, some time later, to the English Lake District.

Outside the town of Keswick looms Skiddaw, a grey slab of a mountain, about 3000 feet high, an immobile, immovable, presence set against the scurrying tourism in the settlement below. Over the fortunes and intersections of 'place as meeting place', it had presided. It seemed in that sense foundational. Indeed, some criticisms had been made of 'a global sense of place', and of related arguments by others, that in the stress on social relations and in the emphasis on openness and change a sense of groundedness had been lost (see, for instance, Dirlik, 2001). What was missing, the critics argued, was any sense of foundation and stable locatedness. Moreover, it was posited, for that to be restored 'Nature' would have to be brought back into the picture.

Now, of course, the topographies of landscapes are constantly evolving. In the Lake District the geomorphological evidence of glaciation is all about. But nonetheless that mountain, Skiddaw, seemed of a different order. In fact, of course, it is not. However to appreciate this it is necessary to engage with a temporality of landscape that is of quite different dimensions. Briefly: Skiddaw is composed of Ordovician slates which were laid down as sediments some 500 million years ago. However what snagged my attention as I was thinking of this history was that *when* they were laid down, in a sea that we now call the Iapetus Ocean, they were one-third of the way south of the equator towards the south pole. It was hundreds of millions of years later that these rocks of Skiddaw crossed the equator on their way through this latitude, now, and later still that they were formed into anything we might call a mountain. What is important here is not the formal knowledge (such tectonic wanderings are now part of popular science) but what one allows it to do to the imagination. For me, initially, this dwelt upon the thought that these are *immigrant* rocks, arrived 'here' from

somewhere else. It was an imagination that was happily congruent, therefore, with the notion of a global sense of place. It is with some reflections upon that congruence that this article is concerned.

## **First Reflection**

The notion of rocks as immigrant had also been seized upon in a poster produced as part of a campaign in the city of Hamburg. A huge rock, dredged up in the river Elbe, and which had become loved by the inhabitants of the city, turned out not to be a 'local' rock at all. Rather it hailed from the north, probably Sweden, a glacial erratic left behind by the retreating ice. The poster pictured it in a campaign around immigration rights, dubbing the rock 'our oldest immigrant'.

In the production of this poster the understanding of 'nature' as endlessly geographically mobile enabled some political messages to be established and, equally significantly, others to be undermined. Most immediately it problematised any notion of intrinsic indigeneity (in the sense of having been eternally present), any question of things being essentially and only local.<sup>(2)</sup> It problematised the notion of local belonging. It demonstrated both allegorically and materially that local place identity does not grow out of the soil. (If even the soil is not 'local'...) The importance of such demonstrations was that they undermined certain political claims to place, and in particular those arguments against in-migration based on notions of a dichotomy between authentically local on the one hand and foreign/intruder on the other.<sup>(3)</sup> In other words, this presentation of geology and geomorphology --- this re-imagination of the ground beneath our feet --- was proffered as both metaphorical reinforcement and scientific legitimation of a particular political stance. The erratic rock of the Elbe was mobilised, as was the Skiddaw story, precisely because they reinforced so well positions that had already been taken.

This is a familiar practice. References from the social sciences and the humanities to the natural sciences flourish everywhere (Massey, 2005). Such references, however, necessarily involve ‘representations’ derived from the sciences being referred to. They involve a kind of second-order representational practice --- the representations, by others, within their own disciplinary structures and concerns, and of their own, constituted, disciplinary objects, are either eagerly seized-upon, or left to one side. One of the complexities of Barbara Bender’s book *Stonehenge* (1998) is her insistence upon a recursive reflexivity that addressed her own representational practices, and such a strategy is necessary also in references between the ‘human’ and ‘natural’ sciences. Steve Hinchliffe (2003), in a consideration of landscapes and natures, reflects precisely upon this, as does David Demeritt’s (1994a) essay on the nature of metaphors.

As Hinchliffe argues, ‘the natures that we ( ... ) want to include in landscape histories and geographies are unlikely to be innocent’ (p.209). This does not mean, as Hinchliffe is careful to point out, that ‘science is necessarily flawed’, nor that a guaranteeably ‘truthful’ representation of nature is possible. Indeed, the burden of his argument is that:

there are ways of engaging with landscapes and natures that refuse to see either as pure culture ( ... ) or as raw matter ( ... ). The intention is to avoid any understanding of nature that reduces ‘it’ to primary ( ... ) properties (a tactic I will refer to pejoratively as a first nature politics) and yet, at the same time, to refuse to obliterate spaces of nature by reading all instances of human/non-human relations as somehow culturally determined. (p.207)

Demeritt, likewise, seeks to plot out a way between the two polar positions (in his case represented by environmental history on the one hand and cultural geography on the other). In his case the way ahead is indicated by the work of

Bruno Latour and, especially, Donna Haraway. What both authors stress, is that it is necessary to be aware of, and open to the critique of, those practices and positions which are being adopted. There is, inevitably and already, here in process some element of human/nonhuman mutual construction. It is impossible to avoid any grounding --- at least in the sense of provisional founding assumptions --- at all.

One point that might be registered here is a kind of inequality that often occurs between the treatment of the so-called natural and the treatment of the so-called cultural. While there is frequent anxiety about any approach to nature, and an insistence on the impossibility of immediate access to 'the real' (our natures are always culturally mediated), the products of culture themselves --- artefacts, texts, discourses --- are often approached without any such reservation.

Moreover, this argument --- about the producedness of science and of our understandings of the physical world --- is in practice most often mobilised in critique of those readings which, for some reason or another, we reject. The reason, in other words, is not one based in the science itself. If followed scrupulously, the argument can lead to difficulties. Thus Demeritt (1994b) analyses in detail the contortions that can result when a critique, through reference to its 'socially constructed' nature, of the science one is opposed to, can uncomfortably be turned back into an examination of the alternative science on which one had implicitly been relying. Demeritt is referring to ecological science, but the cases could be multiplied. Thus, to take one very established but very different example: 'identity' has over recent decades been subject to dramatic reconceptualisation. No longer is identity (on the broader canvass, 'entities') to be theorised as an internally coherent bounded discreteness. Rather it is conceptualised relationally --- with implications both internal (in terms of fragmentation, hybridity, decentering) and external (in terms of the extension of



connectivity). This was a move with enormous political implications: for feminism and those involved in struggles over sexuality, for anti-racism, for post-colonialism. Much of its impetus indeed came precisely from those political engagements, along with the parallel emergence of post-structuralism. However, in the mobilisation of such reconceptualisations in academic texts wider references are often made; and they are made in particular to the ideas of Newton --- how wrong his ideas were, how the billiard-ball view of identity cannot hold, how we know so much better now.

What is the status of such references? Once, Newtonian science was likewise mobilised as guarantor (Massey, 2005; Fabian, 1983). There may well be disagreements within those 'harder' sciences, within which we are not able to judge. So is the function of the reference legitimisation (which would seem at least tendentious) or as a kind of code for signing up to a wider zeitgeist?

Other examples could be given: the wide appreciation of complexity theory probably chief among them. It figures largely, for instance, in the writings of the counter-globalisation and global justice movements, where its potential implications for novel forms of political organisation are frequently drawn out (see, for example, Notes from Nowhere, 2003). In the most extreme of cases positions are adopted *on* science as a result of what appear to be its political implications. This is perhaps particularly true in the case of biology. It has been the case with debates over whether or not there is 'a gay gene' and what kinds of differences there are between women and men. On the one hand, this cannot be adequate. Positions are taken regardless of an evaluation of the science itself. On the other hand, neither can 'science itself' be taken to be a pure bearer of an unmediated truth.

In any case, as the debate over the existence or not of a gay gene has amply demonstrated, political implications are rarely guaranteed.<sup>(4)</sup> The current

metaphors of constant flow, distributed causation, and complexity, can both support the invention of new forms of democratic politics ('from below') and accurately capture some of the most devastating characteristics of neoliberal capitalism. Cybernetics, one of the approaches that underpins the modelling of ecosystems, is castigated by Demeritt (1994a) for its origins in weapons-systems design; but cybernetics was also explored, with far different aims, in Allende's Chile.

## **Second Reflection**

The critics who had been concerned that the new approaches to place, in emphasising the constructedness, the openness and the mobility of place, had lost touch with place as providing a sense of groundedness, had a number of worries. On the one hand there was reference to the need for place to *have* a grounding (in order that it could provide in turn a grounding for those within it). On the other hand there was an implication that it was 'Nature' that might provide it. The kind of grounding being sought was, it seems, a combination of locatedness and stability. Yet here in the northern Lakes, faced with Skiddaw, the very rocks were/are moving on.

Indeed it is worth pausing here to note that the rhetorical effect of this movement is particularly powerful precisely as a result of its geographical location. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that this stretch of north-west England had emerged *as* 'the Lake District', a designation that was integral to a shift in its position within the national psyche. This newly designated Lake District functioned precisely as some kind of grounding: 'as an area of national importance, an icon of stability and harmony' (Edmonds, 2004, p.15). 'The Lakes had all that was needed for the making of "classic ground" outside the flow of modern life. Here were the ingredients of a changeless classical paradise

located squarely within the boundaries of the nation' (p.15). Even the (occasional) figures that appeared in representations of the Lake District appeared 'as stable and timeless as the lakes and fells themselves, as if they were living in some form of "natural state"' (p.16).<sup>(5)</sup>

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, quite contrasting popular understandings of 'nature' --- as endlessly mobile, restless, given to violence and unpredictability --- are widespread. Richard Fortey's book *The Earth: an intimate history* (2005) is a tale of this restlessness, stressing above all that nature is never still, nor simply in balance; and the book sold very widely, in paperback.<sup>(6)</sup> In any given month there seems to be some programme on television documenting (or simply designed to scare us with) tornadoes, volcanoes, the crashing of tectonic plates. It figures as a kind of twenty-first century version of 'nature red in tooth in claw'. Certainly this is not nature as stable or changeless.

And yet one of the understandings of 'nature' that has recently come in for much criticism within the academy is that set of conceptualisations that posit an originary harmony or balance (see Hinchliffe, 2003; Demeritt, 1994b). Particular concepts of ecosystems, or of climax ecologies, can fall into this category in their assumptions of stable equilibria towards which constellations of interactions are said inevitably to be tending. Such critiques are in tune with the television programmes. Indeed it might seem strange that, against a popular background picturing of such a turbulent Nature, they are even necessary. It is rare, however, for one understanding to achieve an uncontested hegemony; it is normal for multiple conceptualisations to coexist. And again, the structuring relation of the critique is political. Most significantly, the notion of a nature that is harmonious and in balance is often mobilised in the cause of a foundationalism in which a settled past is necessarily presupposed in order to enable a narrative of subsequent loss. It is a conceptualisation that can result in (or provide the rationale for) a

politics in which *any* human ‘intervention’ in nature is seen in a negative light, a politics that has been widely criticised particularly for the attitudes towards indigenous societies in which it resulted (Hecht and Cockburn, 1989). In such a narrative it is, moreover, almost structurally impossible to envisage any positive human/nonhuman relation at all. It is a narrative that inevitably entails a nostalgia, and a backward-looking rather than forward-looking outlook. It is an imagination of the Fall, built around a pre/post lapsarian dichotomy. So Rebecca Solnit, in a consideration of artistic work around nature and landscape, bemoans a kind of environmentalism that simply retells the old story: ‘the Fall from grace, the Expulsion from the garden, and the subsequent sinfulness of human beings’ (2001, p.12). What she calls for in its place is an understanding of the world as ‘a continual and sometimes comic improvisation, without initial perfection or a subsequent fall’ (ibid, p.12).<sup>(7)</sup>

One way of conceptualising this notion of a paradise-before-human-intervention is in terms of a ‘First Nature’. However such a nature (of primary properties --- see the Hinchliffe quotation in the last section) need not necessarily be conceptualised as in harmonious balance. And this in turn raises other ‘political’ issues. For if ‘Nature’ is always turbulent, troubled, indeed destructive as well as creative, then how are we to evaluate human intervention? With notions of nature-in-balance there is an ideal, although impossible, to aspire to. With nature mobile and out of equilibrium no guidelines are offered for political action or ethical stance. As Demeritt (1994b) recounts it, the disintegration of ecological science as a foundation for green politics leads Donald Worster to complain

that the new uncertainty about nature, equilibrium, and stability can ‘serve to justify the destruction wrought by contemporary industrial societies’ [1984, p.13]. It blunts the scientific authority of his calls to respect nature and, he fears, leads to an ‘environmental

relativism' whereby it is impossible to distinguish 'between the balance achieved by nature and that contrived by man.' [1977, pp.242, 241] 'What', he asks, 'does the phrase "environmental damage" mean in a world of so much natural chaos?' [1990, p.16] (p.26).

In fact, what has shifted in this moment of dislocation is precisely that presumed relationship between politics/ethics and scientific discourse. The point *is* that no longer can a political position be simply grounded in a reading of nature. The invention of our ethics and politics must happen elsewhere. (Indeed, as I have already intimated, it already does; the shift is perhaps rather in admitting it --- which then in turn may remove the need for legitimating references to 'how nature works' at all.)

A currently widespread discourse within the social sciences (and elsewhere) is an insistence on a rejection of settledness. Indeed, it seems that the aim which is currently *de rigueur* is to 'unsettle' something: a notion of place, a concept of nature in balance. The emphasis is on constant movement, the inevitability and inexorability of process (rather than entity); on flow rather than territory. It has been an important and in some spheres quite revolutionary move. Nonetheless it raises a number of points that are possibly worth considering.

Thus, it is necessary to recognise, more frequently than is the case, that this is a *conceptual* issue. Of course, in the practical conduct of the world we *do* encounter 'entities', there *is* on occasion harmony and balance; there *are* (temporary) stabilisations; there *are* territories and borders (and in the age of globalisation the continuous production of these is important to register, and their political significance and contradictions are multiple --- see Massey, 2005). On the one hand, this means that it is necessary to be alive to the political import of this fact. Demeritt (1994, p.174) is right to insist that 'we need to unlearn our

privilege as loss' (especially when, as here, the 'we' is first world as contrasted with fourth world cultures). But in fact there *is* loss, as the mobile planet, human and nonhuman, continues on its way. There is *material* loss (things will disappear as they are reabsorbed into the cycles of destruction and creation); and there will be a *sense of loss* on occasions also. Moreover it is important to recognise such losses; they can not be eradicated with the wave of a conceptual argument. They require political, and ethical, attention. On the other hand, it *is* the case that such senses of loss cannot justifiably be mobilised as legitimation in themselves of a political strategy to reject change. Change can not be rejected in other words by recourse to (precisely) 'naturalisation'. I may not like the changes happening in my local place, but appealing to some eternal, essential ('natural') character of place that is being disturbed is no grounds for argument. Rather what are at issue are (should be) political questions around power, equality, ethics, democracy, and so on. The stake is not change itself (the denial of it in the past or the refusal of it in the future), for change of some sort is inevitable; rather it is the character and the terms of that change. It is here that the politics needs to be engaged.

Of course, the groundedness that critics such as Dirlik are attempting to bring back into the picture is not of this absolute, conceptual, type. Dirlik indeed is explicit about this. The 'permanence', the 'foundation', that such authors are looking for is established in relation to human experience. It is a relational achievement. Thus Tim Ingold (1993) famously wrote, in relation to 'the temporality of the landscape' in Breugel's painting 'The Harvesters',

We may reasonably suppose that over the centuries, perhaps even millennia, this basic topography has changed but little. *Set against the duration of human memory and experience*, it may therefore be taken to establish a baseline of permanence. (p.166, my emphases)

In the discipline of geography, there is considerable work on performativity which similarly lays stress on on-going engagement and a refusal to put thinking before doing. And there is writing upon landscape which either draws upon or is close to Ingold's 'dwelling' perspective. Now, Barbara Bender has herself been critical of this article by Ingold, for its lack of consideration both of issues of power and inequality and of the historical (and geographical?) specificity of the social relations in play. Moreover much of such writing either assumes or does not question an essential harmony of rhythms and resonances --- a *coherence* of landscape.

However there is a further point, which perhaps arises as a result of this assumption of harmonious coherence, and this is the spatial--temporal (and perhaps especially spatial) *confinement* of such perspectives. Even when critical, its evocations appear to require an intimacy of some sort. It is a confinement, a restriction, which can reverberate in a number of ways. It can, and perhaps most ironically given some of the theoretical dynamics that have given rise to it, 'reinstall human transcendence and so open up the old fault lines between humans and the rest' (Hinchliffe, 2003, p.220). There is, indeed, a human and often individualistic self-absorption in much of this literature, and perhaps particularly in the literature in geography around performativity (see also on this, Demeritt, 1994b). So John Wylie (2002, p.452) in his exploration of the construction of visibility through the presence of others cites Gilles Deleuze 'speaking of a traveller who finds himself stranded upon an island': 'what happens when the other is absent in the structure of the world? Only the brutal opposition of sky and earth reigns with an insupportable light and an obscure abyss' (Deleuze, 1984, p.56). Are sky and earth not others too? So Gaston Bachelard focuses on humans' 'muscular consciousness' (the personal, physical experience of place and landscape) (Bachelard, 1964, p.11) and Simon Schama on *Landscape and*

*Memory* (1995). Such a human focus, however, extends into a more general localism. There is a kind of inward-lookingness, a tendency to focus only on the confines of the particular landscape, or place, itself. A number of commentators have addressed this issue, along with the romanticism of place and landscape to which it can lead. Such is the express concern, for instance, of Don Mitchell (2001) in an explicitly political engagement with, and strong critique of, this local focus within, specifically, landscape geography. His suggested way out, however, is merely to advocate 'scale-theory' ('Local theory ... must give way to scale-theory', p.279), a response which instead of reconceptualising 'the local' rather adds further layers, of different sizes, of confinement. Cloke and Jones (2001), on the other hand, are acutely aware, in their argument through a Somerset orchard, of this range of pitfalls, and wrestle with them throughout their study. In particular, they point to the fact that 'yet another problem with the dwelling perspective ... concerns the "localness" of dwelling' (p.660). Yet escaping it is difficult.

This kind of inward-focusing is frequently reinforced in studies of landscape and place because of the tendency so frequently to read them through history, through the past, through time-embeddedness (see Cloke and Jones, 2001). Ingold writes that 'To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance ... [to engage] perceptually with an environment ... pregnant with the past' (1993, pp.152-3). It is not, in any way, that history and the past are not crucial to the understanding of place and landscape (although a more lively imagination of an intertwining of trajectories which also has a future which must be addressed would serve to counter the impression, so often left, that the present is some kind of achieved terminus). However, when this focus is combined with the human/nonhuman divide to which Hinchliffe points, 'the past' can all too



easily be reduced to human memory. And this, again, is to instate a confinement, this time of the temporal.

If you stand on the slopes of the northern Lake District you can see, to the north across the grass bent in the wind, over to the Solway Firth and Scotland. As Richard Fortey writes 'we can see how the rocks making high ground continue into the Lake District and further north again into Scotland' (2005, p.438). And that word 'continue' captures perfectly the way that the present landscape, and our notion of it, sutures the turmoil that produced it. For, as Fortey puts it, 'the leisurely bite into the British coastline that makes the Solway Firth' ... marks ... 'where the great ocean Iapetus disappeared and two ancient continents conjoined' (p.439). This continuous landscape covers over an ancient fracture and point of contact between the North American and Eurasian plates, one which existed before the fracture that the presently-widening Atlantic now marks. A memory of place, yes; but a more expansive one in time and in space. And a memory not just of 'here'. Or rather maybe it is that the very constitution of 'here', of this landscape, and its magic, is precisely in the outrageous specialness of the current conjunction, this here and now.

The temporalities in Ingold's (1993) consideration of Breugel's 'The Harvesters' are multiple: the temporalities of hills and valley, of paths and tracks, of the tree, the corn, the church, the people. Ingold writes of how these distinct temporalities are interwoven; of how it is these intersections indeed that make --- continue ongoingly to make --- the landscape. However, in part perhaps because of the overall tone of harmonious coherence, in part because of his human-centred focus on a quotidian taskscape, not much is said about the differences between these temporalities, the distinct ways in which they operate and their potentially different effectivities. In many such studies, the binding of the temporalities serves mainly to found the ground for human activities (see also Cloke and Jones,

2001). As Barbara Bender (1998) points out the aim of such dwelling-orientated studies is to conceive of landscape as a product of and generative of activities rather than representations. The result can be an over-tight, over-local, interweaving.<sup>(8)</sup> Thus, in his consideration of rhythms, Ingold writes 'we resonate to the cycles of light and darkness, not to the rotation of the earth' (p.163). Yet maybe the distinct temporalities might have the potential to induce distinct responses. Maybe that acknowledgement, as 'the sun sets' that it is in fact the earth that is turning, is also incorporated into our imaginative and practical engagement with landscape and place. Beyond the relative immediacies of human memory and task-based experience we engage with knowledges and imaginations and with the cosmologies (including precisely political cosmologies --- Fabian, 1983) which frame them. Perhaps this can be so with the appreciation of the histories of those Ordovician rocks, laid down in the Iapetus Ocean, squeezed and contorted as the plates converged, moving over millions of years over the face of the planet, through their present incarnation as Skiddaw slates in a place called the Lake District. Maybe instead of, or as well as, the time-embeddedness that enables that relational achievement of the establishment of a (provisional) ground, such histories push a need to rethink our security. Certainly such histories have the potential to be read as removing the absoluteness of such grounding, so that all we are left with is our interdependence, a kind of suspended, constantly-being-made interdependence, human and beyond human. Maybe this is, or could be, one of the potentials of landscape as a provocation.

But there is a final point that merits consideration about this current urge to unsettle, and this is that it is indeed a conceptual issue. Whether or not it claims legitimacy in a particular reading of the sciences of material nature, it is itself a kind of grounding, a position-taking. It is an anti-foundationalism --- and thus in itself is a position. It is from this recognition that the third reflection takes off.

### **Third Reflection**

As Demeritt (1994b) argues, and as proposed in the First Reflection here, ‘nature’ can provide no absolute legitimation for particular scientific positions, and science in that sense can provide no legitimation to which a particular politics can appeal. As Demeritt has it, nature has provided ‘a silent, but transcendent, authorization for scientific and other discourses that are legitimated by appeal to the way the world works. Through such appeals to nature, science has replaced religion as the pre-eminent form of social legitimation’ (1994b, p.34). It is this sequential structure of appeal that must now be acknowledged as illegitimate. The sciences of nature should not be hailed, in that general sense, as a means of ‘proving’ the correctness of a particular politics.

Nonetheless, the argument can still be taken further, and this is particularly so if engagement with nature (in this case in the form of landscape) is expanded beyond the largely quotidian intimacies of the taskscape. If, that is, we follow Latour’s injunction to ‘learn to be affected’ and allow that to extend into wider realms of thought and imagination (Latour, 2001; see Hinchliffe, 2003, p.216). In that sense, it is possible to read those travelling, changing (‘becoming’) Ordovician rocks of Skiddaw through a more philosophical lens as playing into, or maybe as another element in, that deeper anti-foundationalism that has lain at the heart of many developments within modernity. This is an anti-foundationalism that insists on a commitment to openness and questioning.

One of the ways this can be read is in relation to the very ‘science’ that has been under discussion here. Demeritt writes that ‘the idea of a singular, transcendental truth about the world underwrites the entire Enlightenment project’ (1994b, p.32). This is so. However it is nevertheless also the case, and with full regard to its inevitably ‘socially constructed’ character, that western science is also committed to a holding-open of the content of that truth; in principle it

proceeds by a continuous process of questioning. Of course, this itself entails a 'faith', a grounding, in other things --- in that very process itself; in rationality. Nonetheless, to ignore those characteristics of questioning and debate can render one defenceless in crucial arguments. How, for instance, indeed *why*, distinguish between theories of evolution on the one hand and positions which uphold creationism or intelligent design on the other? Tristram Hunt, indeed, in an article documenting the persistent dismissal of scientific evidence (however provisional, however socially produced) by the administration of George W. Bush, reports that not only is evolution now less frequently taught in the USA, but that 'With the successful assault on evolution behind them, evangelicals are starting to train their sights on the earth sciences of geology and physics' (Hunt, 2005). The understanding that the Skiddaw slates were laid down some 500 million years ago and in the southern hemisphere may, then, be open to challenge. This, however, would not be a challenge from some other trajectory of scientific questioning, but rather a challenge by assertion from a holy book. Holy books themselves, though open to interpretation, are not open to challenge.

It is important, then, to insist on western science as a specific and relatively autonomous discourse. Thus, although as previously cited 'science has replaced religion as the pre-eminent form of social legitimation' (Demeritt, 1994b, p.34) (though the activities of the Bush administration give pause for thought even here), science and religion are not simply equivalent. As Demeritt says 'we should look to science not as a mirror to nature but as a useful tool for engaging our world critically' (p.33), but this must be a more serious engagement than merely appropriating its conclusions where they 'prove useful and convincing' (p.33). Otherwise we end back in the gay-gene situation, where already-established political predispositions are the basis on which to evaluate science.

Finally, this anti-foundationalist commitment to openness and to questioning is central also to debates within political philosophy. As writers such as Claude Lefort, and others such as Chantal Mouffe within the radical democracy tradition, have argued, the hallmark of a fully democratic society is the ability to hold as in principle at risk the very foundations of the constitution of that society. Thus Rosalyn Deutsche, drawing on Lefort, writes of the hallmark of democracy being 'the disappearance of certainty about the foundations of social life' (1996, p.272); where it is necessary to recognise even 'the legitimacy of debate about what is legitimate and what is illegitimate' (p.273). At this point the fact that here such reflections have arisen as the result of engagement with rocks importantly extends the normal scope of this political science debate, which so often not only restricts its attention to the humanly social but also implicitly or explicitly depends upon a nonhuman background that is harmoniously in balance (see Clark, 2002). That space of agonistic negotiation that is the political should be recognised as including negotiation also with that realm that goes by the name of nature. It will, moreover, be a negotiation that includes within it the very conceptualisation of that 'nature' itself.

In such an understanding of the political, ethical principles are not legitimated by an appeal through science to nature. Rather it is necessary to evolve those principles as we go along (see, for instance, Weeks, 1995). It is, indeed, a responsibility to invent them, and we do it through a range of activities, practices, affects, engagements, discourses. It is in this sense, and as Hinchliffe (pp.207, 222) argues about our inhabitation specifically of landscape, radically experimental. This, then, is a connection from the moving mountains, not to particular political positions, but to the nature of the (Western, modern) 'political' *tout court*. And, it has also finally to be stated, it too --- as the resurgence of a

multitude of fundamentalisms of holy books serves at the moment only too well to demonstrate --- is one potential position among many.

## **Landscape and place**

However, if such philosophical reflections are one potential outcome of the provocation that is a landscape, another is the reimagining of landscape and place themselves. The reorientation stimulated by the conceptualisation of the rocks as on the move leads even more clearly to an understanding of both place and landscape as *events*, as happenings, as moments that will be again dispersed.

One, among many, of the ways to approach landscape is through concepts of space and time. Hegemonic conceptualisations of time understand it as the ineffable dimension of change, as internal to things and as intangible.<sup>(9)</sup> In a kind of philosophical 'response', space has frequently come to be defined as time's opposite (and indeed one of the problems in the conceptualisation of space has been this manner of understanding space as a kind of residual category, as what time is not). It is thus that we have space as the material world, as the given, as the great out there. It is in this guise that it becomes so frequently elided with land and landscape (space as something we travel across). In such imaginaries, both space and landscape take the form of surfaces. For a whole host of reasons this is problematical (see Massey, 2005). Rather, and once again bearing in mind the movement of the rocks, both space and landscape could be imagined as provisionally intertwined simultaneities of ongoing, unfinished, stories. Space, as a dimension, cuts through such trajectories, but not to stabilise them into a surface; rather space is imbued with time (and here we pick up again on that opening 'personal communication' from Barbara Bender). Moreover, one constantly emergent, ongoing, product of that intertwining of trajectories is what we call the landscape. (And conceptualising it thus can also encourage a

disaggregation of 'Nature' too into a multiplicity of trajectories --- a move which further militates against the temptations of foundationalism.) Indeed, maybe the very notion of 'landscape' has on occasions worked to suture any underlying constitutive jarrings and discontinuities, and evoked a surface which renders that intertwining --- of Histories and Geographies, as the opening quotation has it --- knowable and fully representable. Rather it is that a landscape, these hills, are the (temporary) product of a meeting up of trajectories out of which mobile uncertainty a future is --- has to be --- negotiated.

## Notes

- (1) This paper was written in honour of Barbara Bender, on the occasion of her retirement. I should also like to acknowledge the Geography Department at Hull University where, on the occasion of my presenting The Appleton Bi-annual Public Lecture on Landscape, some of these reflections began.
- (2) 'Essentially and only local' in the sense that they are not born of any connections beyond the area.
- (3) Note that this does not by any means address all the arguments that are mobilised against immigration.
- (4) 'Political implications' here in their immediate empirical sense --- see later.
- (5) Edmonds' book not only challenges this but also stresses the wider geographical connectivities of those who, through the neolithic, worked this area.
- (6) Fortey's book is also an example of movement across the human science/natural science divide, but in the opposite direction. To this social scientist, at least, some of these forays were embarrassing both in their simplicity and in their tendency to environmental determinism.
- (7) See Biggs (2005), from which these quotations were taken.
- (8) Wylie's (2002) ascent of Glastonbury Tor is interesting here. Precisely though its materialisation and embodiment of the visual and visibility it engages with wider philosophical issues. It enables him to bring home the later Merleau-Ponty's point that, being only enabled to see by the fact of being visible, by being visibly embodied, he is 'one of them' (Wylie, p.452; Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Yet in the end the focus is on individual subjectivity.
- (9) Conceptualisations of space, and of time, are central to Massey, 2005. The brief argument here depends on the far longer discussions elaborated there.



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