Chapter 6

The Place of Emotions within Place

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For a decade or so I have been interested in how it is that visitors (and indeed local people) experience place. What are the pleasures of place? What emotions are provoked by being in a relatively unfamiliar place? How do we learn to release appropriate emotions in those other places? What are the different senses mobilised by being elsewhere? What is involved in ‘touring’ other places?

I will not deal with all these issues but will develop one theme that relates to shifts in the nature of place. This theme can be captured through a distinction present in Wordsworth between land and landscape as distinct forms of belongingness (Milton 1993). The former conceptualises land as a physical, tangible resource that can be ploughed, sown, grazed and built upon. Land is a place of work conceived functionally. As a tangible resource, land is bought and sold, inherited and left to children. To dwell on a farm is to participate in a pattern of life where productive and unproductive activities resonate with each other and with very particular tracts of land, whose history and geography will be known in detail. There is a lack of distance between people and things. Emotions are intimately tied into place, rather as Sarah Hall (2002) describes in her evocative novel Haweswater set in the village of Mardale in 1936.

The practice of land is quite different from that of landscape. The practice of landscape entails an intangible resource whose definitive feature is a place’s appearance or look (Milton 1993). This notion emphasises leisure, relaxation and the visual consumption of place especially by those ‘touring’. As Judith Adler (1989) shows there developed in western Europe from the eighteenth century onwards a specialised visual sense. This was based upon a variety of novel technologies, the camera obscura, the claude glass, guidebooks, the widespread knowledge of routes, the art of sketching, the balcony, photography and so on (Ousby, 1990). Areas of often wild, barren nature, once sources of terror and fear, were transformed into landscape, what Raymond Williams (1972: 160) terms ‘scenery, landscape, image, fresh air’, places waiting at a distance for visual consumption by those visiting from ‘dark satanic mills’ (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998). By 1844 Wordsworth noted that the idea of landscape was a recent development. But within a few years houses were being built with regard to their ‘prospects’ as though they were a kind of ‘camera’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998: 79). The language of views thus prescribed a particular visual structure to the emotional experience of place. Land gave way to landscape (Green, 1990: 88). As
Miss Bartlett paradigmatically declares in *A Room with a View*: ‘A view? Oh a view! How delightful a view is!’ (Forster 1955: 8, orig 1908).

This transition can be seen in the English Lake District. A place of ‘land’, according to Daniel Defoe, of inhospitable terror, came to be transformed into ‘landscape’, a place of beauty, emotion and desire (Urry, 1995). Similarly, the Alps before the end of the eighteenth century had been regarded as mountains of immense inhospitality, ugliness and terror. But they too became ‘civilised’. Ring (2000: 9) describes how the Alps ‘are not simply the Alps. They are a unique visual, cultural, geological and natural phenomenon, indissolubly wed to European history’. And by the end of the eighteenth century the land of Caribbean ‘tropical nature’ had been romanticised by European travellers who began to see the scenery as though it were a ‘painting’, as landscape (Sheller, 2002). And there are countless other examples of how places of land, became places of visual desire, as the inhospitable was turned into a place of emotion, of landscape, especially for rich (male) European visitors.

In this irreversible shift to landscape, the 1840s technology of photography plays a seminal role. Touring and photography could be said to commence in the ‘west’ around 1840. Louis Daguerre and Fox Talbot announced their somewhat different ‘inventions’ of the camera, in 1839 and 1840. In 1841, Thomas Cook organised what is now regarded as the first packaged ‘tour’; the first railway hotel was opened in York just before the 1840s railway mania; the first national railway timetable, Bradshaws, was published; Cunard started the first ever Ocean steamship service; and Wells Fargo, the forerunner of American Express, began stagecoach services across the American west (Lash and Urry, 1994: 261). This I have argued is the moment when the ‘tourist gaze’ emerges, involving the combining together of the means of collective travel, the desire for travel, the techniques of visual reproduction and the emotion of landscape (Urry, 2002). As a visitor to Victoria Falls subsequently declared: ‘Wow, that’s so postcard’ (quoted Osborne 2000: 79) as landscape rather than land had become all the rage; with even Ruskin declaring that daguerreotypes are ‘glorious things ... nearly the same as carrying off a palace itself’ (quoted Botton, de 2002: 223).

Moreover, one particular way of experiencing place became particularly valued, what I have called the romantic gaze. In this what is emphasised is a solitudinous, personal, semi-spiritual relationship with place. People expect to experience the place privately or at least only with ‘significant others’. Large numbers of other visitors, as at the Taj Mahal, intrude upon and spoil that lonely contemplation desired by western visitors, as famously seen in the Princess Diana shot at the Taj (Edensor, 1998: 121-3). The romantic gaze involves further quests for ever new objects of this solitary experience, as reflected in Alex Garland’s *The Beach* (1997), a process like the sorcerer’s apprentice, consuming and devouring the very places that are sought out for the emotional and solitary appropriation of place.

By contrast what I have called the collective tourist gaze involves conviviality. Other people also in that place give liveliness or a sense of carnival or movement. Large numbers of people that are present indicate that this is the place to be. These moving, viewing others are obligatory for the emotional experience of
place, as in a cosmopolitan New York, on a beach in Rio, in the casinos of Las Vegas, at the Sydney Olympics, in a club in Ibiza and so on. Baudelaire’s account of flânerie captures this emotional immersion; he describes: ‘dwellings in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting’ (cited by Tester, 1994: 2).

I have so far talked about the pleasures of place, noting the shift from land to landscape. I also distinguished between the romantic and collective forms of landscape. However, the notion of place needs to be further developed here.

Place should not be thought of as an abstract Cartesian space that can be defined by various geometric coordinates. Rather places are centres of many material activities, including the purchase and use of goods and services. And very many places across the globe are being restructured as places of consumption, of what Fainstein and Judd (1999) term ‘places to play’. Places are emotionally pleasurable because they are sites of intense and heightened consumption, locations within which distinct goods and services are compared, evaluated, purchased and used (and over-used). Places to play are often places of excess, where consumption is taken to extreme. Examples of such consumption taken to excess include gambling in Las Vegas, Broadway shows in New York, extreme sports in Queenstown, New Zealand, country house meals in the English Lake District, exotic sex tourism in Thailand, water sports in the Caribbean, recreational drugs in Ibiza, whisky in Scotland and so on.

The pleasure of such places derives from the consumption of goods and services that somehow stand for or signify that place. Through consuming certain goods and services the place itself comes to be experienced. The good or service is metonymic of the place, with the part standing for the whole. The consuming of place involves the consumption of goods/services that are somehow unique or at least culturally specific to that place. People eat, drink, gamble, waterski, smoke, bungee jump, the ‘other’ (see Urry 2002: 3).

Or so people hope. But often of course places are places of disappointment, frustration, bitterness, perhaps best captured in The Beach (Garland, 1997). There is often a massive gap between what people anticipate will be a place’s pleasures and what is actually encountered. Thus the items of consumption may not be available (the hotel is closed for the winter), or the services have become too commercial (as on the beach at Goa), or the service delivery has become too expensive (as in a Parisian restaurant) or too low quality (as in a guest house in a fading British seaside resort such as Morecambe), or the arts shops have turned into souvenir stalls (as at Albert Dock in London) and so on.

In many ways the pleasures of place are thus contradicted by the actual consumption possibilities, especially with the domination of the world economy with huge homogenising capitalist corporations. Such companies often fail to ensure the specificity of the commodity, or of attracting other consumers consistent with the emotional pleasures of that place. So emotionally experiencing a place through consuming certain goods and services is shot through with contradiction and ambiguity (see Urry 2002 and also Chapters 4, 5 and 9 in this volume).

The dynamic conception of place can be further explored through Kevin Hetherington’s (1997: 185-9) notion of place as a ‘place of movement’. ‘Imagine’, he says, ‘place as being like a ship’ (Hetherington, 1997: 185). They are not
something that stays in one location but move around within networks of agents, humans and non-humans. Places are about relationships, about the placings of materials and the system of difference that they perform. Places are located in relation to sets of objects rather than being fixed only through subjects and their uniquely human meanings and interactions.

I take three points from this analysis. First, objects are highly significant in the nature of place. Various objects constitute the basis of an ‘imagined presence’, carrying that imagined presence across the members of a local community. Places also carry traces of the memories of different social groups who have lived in or passed through that place. All sorts of contestation over those memories mark off each place. Various objects can function in this way and not just the immense, official monuments of community. We might also note the incredible significance of various kinds of buildings as central to place. The building in Bilbao of the Frank Gehry Guggenheim is a classic example of the power of landmark building and celebrity-architects to reposition place, to move Bilbao closer to the global centre.

Second, places can be distinguished in terms of whether they are temporally rich or poor. Richard Sennett (1991: Chapter 7) for example says that some ‘places [are] full of time’ and it is this that makes them brim with ‘cosmopolitan opportunity’. They are based upon instantaneous time, a time induced by the dazzling disorientation of Virilio’s ‘speed’ (1986). Other places exhibit a ‘drudgery of place’, the sense of being inexorably tied there and where time seems fixed and unchanging. Such places remain heavy with time. Some places are thus left behind in the ‘slow lane’, as with many English seaside resorts.

And third, places even based upon a high degree of geographical propinquity depend upon movement. Paths can show the accumulated imprint of countless journeys that have been made, as people go about their day-to-day business. The network of paths shows the sedimented activity of a community stretching over many generations; it is what Tim Ingold (1993b: 167) terms the taskscape made visible (Macnaghten and Urry 1998). People imagine themselves treading the same paths as countless earlier generations that have lived there or thereabouts.

But also places are massively interconnected to many other places through movement. Raymond Williams (1988) in the novel Border Country is, according to Tony Pinkney (1991: 49), ‘fascinated by the networks men and women set up, the trails and territorial structures they make as they move across a region, and the ways these interact or interfere with each other’. Likewise Henry Thoreau (1927: 103) in his evocative return to ‘nature’ on the banks of Walden Pond in the mid-nineteenth century did not complain about the sound of the railway. He considered that he was: ‘refreshed and expanded when the freight train rattles past me, and I smell the stores which go dispensing their odours all the way from Long Wharf to Lake Champlain, reminding me of foreign parts ... and the extent of the globe. I feel more like a citizen of the world’.

This movement of place can be seen in the history of the Lake District (see Urry 1995: Chapter 13). This place in the north west only really became part of England when many visitors, especially artists and writers, travelled to it from the metropolitan centre at the end of the eighteenth century onwards. These visitors,
with their poetic reassessment in terms of the picturesque and the sublime of the objects of mountains, lakes, tarns and waterfalls, moved the Lake counties closer to the centre of England. Land got changed into landscape through artists and writers ‘moving’ the Lake counties into English culture. It had previously been ‘on the margins’, left behind in the slow lane of eighteenth century English life.

Many of the key writers were deemed to be from that place, and became known as the ‘Lake poets’ (whether or not they were ‘local’). The Wordsworths, Southey, Coleridge and so on became celebrities in an area previously without national celebrities. They became major tourist attractions especially for metropolitan visitors. By the 1840s Wordsworth was receiving 500 visitors a year at Rydal Mount. And after their death the Lake poets were transformed into literary shrines and memorialised as core figures at the very heart of English literature. These visitors had brought the peripheral and background area of inhospitable terror, of land, closer to the centre, almost part of a metropolitan nature. And this parallels the process that Nicholas Green (1990: 88) describes as the ‘metropolitanising of nature’ around Paris in the mid-nineteenth century.

But this was achieved at a cost. For the emotional pleasures of place to be achieved through this moving to the ‘centre’ involves further shifts from land to landscape. E.M. Forster in Howard’s End characterises the process by which certain places, like London or Paris, have come to be nomadic or cosmopolitan. He argued that ‘Under cosmopolitanism ... we shall receive no help from the earth. Trees and meadows and mountains will only be a spectacle ...’ or what I have called above ‘landscape’ (E.M. Forster 1931: 243; see Szerszynski and Urry 2002, for research related to the following). Certain places seem quintessentially cosmopolitan and this is what makes them pleasurable; other places are not. And certain sorts of places come to be detached from nature and the physical environment. Nature is transformed into landscape, comprised of images of trees, meadows and mountains that are to be known about, compared, evaluated, possessed, but not places that can be ‘dwell-within’ as land.

It seems that, as visuality has become central to the experience of place, so it has turned into an abstracted, disembodied quality or capacity. There is thus a tendency for all places in the end to become cosmopolitan and nomadic. The related shift to a visual economy of nature – the assumption that nature and place are above all to be looked at rather than used and appropriated – assists this ‘de-substantialisation’ of place. A given locality becomes not a unique place, with its own associations and meanings for those dwelling or even visiting there, but a particular combination of abstract characteristics, which mark it out as similar or different, as more or less scenic than other places.

The language of landscape is thus a language of mobility, of abstract characteristics. It is not just that such mobility is necessary if one is to develop the capacity to be reflexive about landscape. It is also that landscape talk is itself an expression of the life-world of mobile groups, as Bron Szerszynski and I have shown elsewhere (2002). These mobile groups include both tourists and environmentalists as Buzard (1993) brings out well. They also include elderly women from the Isle of Skye as Sharon Macdonald (1997) illustrates in recounting a common story heard, which runs as follows:
There was an old woman ... living in township X. One day a couple of tourists come by and start asking her questions.

'Have you ever been outside this village?' ...
'Well, yes. I was at my sisters in [neighbouring township] ...
'But you've never been off the island?'
'Well, I have, though not often I suppose'.
'So, you've been to the mainland?' She nods. 'So you found Inverness a big city then?
'Well, not so big as Paris, New York or Sydney, of course ...'.

Thus it seems that almost all places are 'toured' and the pleasures of place derive at least in part from the emotions involved in visual consumption of place. This produces the emotion of movement, of bodies, images, information, moving over, under and across the globe and reflexively monitoring places in terms of abstract characteristics. Those mobilities, a 'fluid modernity' according to Zygmunt Bauman (2000), have produced a widespread capacity for aesthetic judgment that in turn feeds into and animates global tourism as well as the environmental movement.

And this is judgment from afar, not necessarily 'grounded', a judgment possessive and abstract. In The Beaten Track Buzard notes how Wordsworth's The Brother 'signifies the beginning of modernity ... a time when one stops belonging to a culture and can only tour it' (Buzard 1993: 27). Thus our destiny is to find pleasure in place through an unrelenting visual economy of signs although of course diverse other senses get mobilised at the margins, as occasional resistances, as resistant Bodies of Nature (Macnamaghten and Urry 2001).

As Alain de Botton (2002: 223) notes 'Technology may make it easier to reach beauty, but it has not simplified the process of possessing or appreciating it'. Places have thus turned into a set of abstract characteristics in a mobile world, ever easier to get to, but not appreciated from within. The tourism industry rushes headlong to search for new 'rooms with a view' before they are 'postcarded'. And we are all consumed in this. Experiencing place as landscape, as something to tour, is our destiny. It cannot be avoided and the emotions we experience as poets, novelists, older women on the Isle of Skye, environmentalists or tourists are all judgments from afar, abstract and mobile.

And this somewhat paradoxically parallels the judgements made by the Manchester Water Company when it sized up the building of the dam in Haweswater and submerged the land of Mardale in the late 1930s. A new landscape was born as the land disappeared under the dark torrent of water rushing into the valley and forming a modern reservoir, as Sarah Hall's (2002) novel evocatively recounts. Valleys get submerged under floods of water or of tourists or of environmentalists or even of locals who are all destined only to enjoy the emotions of 'touring'.

References