

Holloway is a study of how landscape shapes us whilst we shape it, or how “people and landscape...are ‘mutually constituted’.” (Ingold, 2011: 129). The reciprocal nature of the human relationship with landscape is poignantly exemplified by this buried pathway, leading Macfarlane to conclude that “stretches of a path might carry memories of a person just as a person might of a path” (Macfarlane et al., 2013: 20). This writing about how landscape bears witness to human experience can evoke and provoke in ways beyond simple viewing and aesthetic appreciation. It is punctuated by illustrations of the holloway which all show the same thing, not a panorama - but a void, an absence, something, someone missing:

“I had not gone in search of Roger’s shade, but I found him there nonetheless, glimpsed startlingly clearly at the turn of a corner or the edge of a tree line. Actual memory traces existed in the stumps of the holly saplings we had cut as staffs, our blade-marks still visible in the wood.”

(Macfarlane et al., 2013: 20)

This example of embodied human connection to landscape is far from being a unique perception; it is in fact an attachment that underpins our everyday existence and which all our ancestors will have experienced as they worked with and in the land, building, sowing, harvesting, exploring and travelling. Until very recent times, active participation in landscape has been the everyday stuff of life itself, but now “We are literally losing touch, becoming disembodied, more than in any previous historical period” (Macfarlane, 2011: xxxi, from his introduction to the new edition of *The Living Mountain*)(N. Shepherd, 2011). Macfarlane has been hugely influenced by *The Living Mountain*, an account of Shepherd’s lifelong relationship with the Cairngorm mountains. The writing is a heartfelt exploration of what engagement with landscape means at its most intimately embodied. She relates human impacts on the landscape, but her attention is more often on what it means for her own bodily knowledge of the place. In describing what it is to fall asleep on the open mountain, Shepherd writes “I am emptied of preoccupation, there is nothing between me and the earth and sky.” (N. Shepherd, 2011: 90). Whilst asleep, she becomes more yet more part of the ground, and on waking;

“ceasing to be a stone, to be the soil of the earth, opening eyes that have human cognisance behind them upon what one has been so profoundly a part of. That is all. One has been in.”

(N. Shepherd, 2011: 92)

This connection to the world is a rich and spiritually nourishing experience for Shepherd, but it is more than that, it is the absolute essence of being a person. Her journey in to the mountain “is a journey into Being; for as I penetrate more deeply into the mountain’s life, I penetrate also into my own...I am not out of myself, but in myself. I am.” (N. Shepherd, 2011: 108). It is this primary engagement with landscape that brings with it human joy, but also respect for our surroundings, which comes from the greater knowledge that is accumulated. Shepherd does not claim to know everything about the mountain, indeed she is very humble about the scope of mere human knowledge compared to the scale of the complexity of the mountain itself. She does, however, prize the opportunity that the landscape gives her, to live through her senses:

“Here then may be lived a life of the sense so pure, so untouched by any mode of apprehension but their own, that the body may be said to think...If I had other senses there are other things I should know...Yet, with what we have, what wealth!”

(N. Shepherd, 2011: 105-6)

This relationship between walker and landscape is arguably a modern manifestation of embodied engagement; a privileged leisure activity that replaces earlier forms of exposure to the outdoors, such as described, here, by Ingold:

“in medieval times the land was scaped by the people who, with foot, axe and plough... in an immediate, muscular and visceral engagement with wood, grass and soil – the very opposite of the distanced, contemplative and panoramic optic that the word ‘landscape’ conjures up in many minds today”

(Ingold, 2011: 126-127)

Of course, such primary engagement can mean exposure, danger and discomfort. Nan Shepherd recounts tales of the grim deaths of walkers on the Cairngorms and reports that the mountain dwellers have “only condemnation for winter climbing” (N. Shepherd, 2011: 84). The potential brutality of the landscape is sometimes recalled in ceremony, such as in the ancient practice of ‘beating the bounds’, led by the parish priest of St Michael’s church, Oxford, each Ascension Day (Shirley, 2015; Olwig, 2008). This tradition comprises a day-long walk around the parish, using canes to beat the twenty-two stones which mark the boundary. Historically;

“the practice of beating the bounds did not only refer to the beating of boundary stones but also of boys. The idea being that having one’s head hit against a stone... would instil

a memory of its location and ensure the knowledge of the parish boundaries was passed on to future generations”

(Shirley, 2015: 2)

This physical experience of a parish boundary emphasises the great significance of the territory to the inhabitants, with a longevity of knowledge through physical connection. The brutal nature of the tradition illustrates a relationship with landscape very different from the gentle, reverential experience of *Holloway*, but demonstrates the same point; the vital nature of the physical human relationship with landscape. This is closely related to the idea of ‘mētis’, used for example by James C. Scott, who states that he is

“...making a case against an imperial or hegemonic planning mentality that excludes the necessary role of local knowledge and know-how...to conceptualize the nature of practical knowledge and to contrast it with more formal, deductive, epistemic knowledge. The term mētis...the knowledge that can come only from practical experience”

(J. C. Scott, 1998: 6)

This thesis argues that knowledge gained from the primary source of embodied experience of landscape is such a rich and essential form of knowledge that the landscape designer should consider gaining it to be an essential part of their professional responsibility to that landscape. This means both spending time in the landscape themselves, and also accessing the knowledge of inhabitants who have accrued significant first-hand experience of the place.

Macfarlane and Shepherd are perhaps extreme examples of devotion to landscape, who demonstrate what is possible rather than what is likely in the everyday. Rural places on the urban periphery, such as Ashley, are at significant risk of the alienation of people from landscape, because the place may be functioning largely as a ‘dormitory’ for the city; sparsely populated for much of the working week and only sporadically visited by incomers at weekends. Such locations do not necessarily have the attractions of a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, neither do they offer the modern leisure facilities of the nearby city. Their roads are largely without footpaths or cycle ways and very difficult to walk safely, so almost all movement of inhabitants through the landscape, to work or to school, is estranged from it, in a car. Indeed, the landscape can come to be viewed by some as simply a functional network of transport links, in which places become ‘interchanges’. Compare this to the life of the typical city dweller, who can so easily walk to school, restaurants, bars, libraries and parks. In Ashley, most of the land is privately owned and inaccessible, so basic leisure activities in woodlands or

fields are very restricted. In these circumstances, unless they work directly with the land, each individual's engagement with their landscape can become a difficult thing; constrained, or even nullified. In such places, the need for substantially improved public engagement with landscape is the most pressing.