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## LANDSCAPE BIOGRAPHIES GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE PRODUCTION AND TRANSMISSION OF LANDSCAPES

Amsterdam University Press (Landscape & Heritage Studies), 2015, xi + 421 pp., 105 black-and-white illustrations, ISBN 978 90 8964 472 5, € 99

This is a long-awaited book, conceived at the 2010 PECSRL conference in Riga but seemingly delayed by events (in many chapters the bibliographic references mainly stop at 2012 or earlier). This is unfortunate: not all recent developments in landscape and heritage fields are reflected in the final versions of chapters originally written a few years ago. But it was worth the wait and we now have a clear explanation – and importantly – demonstration of what ‘landscape biography’ is.

For those of us unable to read Jan Kolen’s doctoral thesis published in Dutch in 2005, the previously most-accessible account of his ideas on landscape biography was a paper on the NWO ‘South Netherlands’ project in the journal *Landscape Research* in 2009. This book adds depth, new layers of thinking and most importantly a host of new examples of how to describe landscape through the filter of human biography (or, sometimes, through landscape’s ‘own’ biography, but more of that later). The theorisation and practice of landscape has moved on however since archaeological thinking on landscape biography began in the mid 1990s. The South Netherlands project was a landscape-scale exercise in archaeological synthesis designed to inform planning and heritage decisions, but since then the search for relevance in heritage and planning has expanded to an insistence that ‘landscape’ can help society to address major challenges from climate

change resilience to migration and demographic shortfalls. Interdisciplinarity is now a core concern (and value) of landscape research, and as the book’s case studies show landscape with all its historical, mnemonic and cultural/human dimensions is widely accepted as a ubiquitous presence (or essence) in city as well as countryside, in post-industrial contexts as well as conventionally ‘beautiful’ places. All of those ideas are embedded in the European Landscape Convention (‘ELC’), which as far as I can see is not discussed in this book (although I may have missed it in the absence of an index or a searchable e-book); its absence (because seen as bureaucratic rather than academic?) weakens the book.

This review focuses on the overall idea of landscape biography presented by the book. There are 18 chapters by 22 named authors and/or editors, and to discuss each chapter in adequate detail would need much more space. Suffice to say that the book makes a good companion to *The Cultural Landscape and Heritage Paradox* (2010, from Tom Bloemers’ 2008 NWO Lunteren conference) and *Landscape Archaeology between Arts and Science* (2012, from the first ‘LAC’ conference held in 2010 in Amsterdam), both in the same AUP series. *Landscape Biographies*, like those earlier books, is a carefully-made collection of differently-authored chapters; unlike the earlier books, which explore a broad diversity of approaches, it focuses in detail on

one particular method and approach. To the present reviewer at least, it has a distinctively Dutch flavour, even though only about half of the 20 or more case studies (and of the authors) are Dutch, the others being in adjacent countries (England, Denmark, Germany) or in Nordic/Baltic Europe (Iceland [two], Sweden and Estonia) whilst one touches on Portugal, and Rome gets a look in of course. Two chapters look further afield, to Shanghai and – through the eyes of Piet Mondrian – to Manhattan (which also features in the editors' introductory chapter).

The book is not divided into parts but there is logic to the order of its chapters, as explained at the end of chapter 1, which in effect divides it into six parts. First is an essential introductory chapter by Kolen and Renes, including identification of four key issues. In the second section come three chapters (2-4) that consider less 'touched' or more 'natural' landscapes: two about Iceland (Edward H. Huijbens and Gisli Pálsson on Icelandic wetlands and Edward H. Huijbens and Karl Benediktsson on car use in the Icelandic wilderness), and one (Kolen's own chapter) about material and intangible landscape authorship in Dutch fens and meadows.

In the third and fourth sections of the book are accounts of landscape biography in conventional rural historic landscape contexts. Chapters 5-7 offer studies of social authorship of landscapes through the prehistoric *longue durée* at Avebury (Mark Gillings and Joshua Pollard), on Neolithic megalithic Öland (Ludvig Pappmehl-Dufay) and in Portugal (Cornelius Holtorf), although characteristically the latter is much more wide-ranging than its temporal or spatial context. Chapters 8 and 9 provide examples of more-or-less individual authorship in the relatively short *durée* of the early modern period, at Eerder Achterbroeck (Michiel Purmer) and Het Loo (Hanneke Ronnes).

In a sense at the heart of the book – refreshingly given the tendency for the landscape of cities to be (still) overlooked – is a fifth section (chapters 10-13) discussing New York (Mondrian's version of it), one of the more adventurous of the chapters (Jürgen Stoye), Shanghai through popular culture (David Koren), and streets in Utrecht (John de Jong) and Breda (Wim Hupperetz). Finally the sixth part of the book (chapters 14-18) discuss what I loosely think of as 'aftermath' issues, the various ways in which people and their landscapes survived the 20th century. This is thus a discussion of the heritage and the emotional weight and agency of the past in the present. This final section has chapters on the Limburg coalfields (Felix van Veldhoven), the 'fatal attraction' of Third Reich aesthetics and attitudes (Rob van der Laarse), regeneration planning for the Carlsberg brewery in Copenhagen (Svava Riesto), an analysis of the concept of 'layering' (Johannes Renes) (slightly out of place in this position of the book because it covers much wider issues), and the

heritage issues in a state-'protected' Estonian village (Helen Sooväli-Sepping).

The book's theory of landscape biography derives from Kolen's research, but there is also a very large cast of other theorisations. Braudel's *'longue durée'*, Ingold's taskscape, and Cosgrove's representationality all take to the stage, and there are many others. There are strange gaps, however, especially bearing in mind the urban focus. Lynch gets mentions but the Italian architect Caniggia and the British-based German geographer Conzen do not. The editors give Hoskins a couple of mentions but he does not receive discussion from others, and I saw little or no mention (although, again, without an index it is difficult to check) of the Americans Sauer, Jackson or either of the Mitchells, all of whom have written much about people in landscape. Even with these gaps, however, the number of quoted theories becomes almost overwhelming, and the argument comes close to being over-theorised. There also seems to be a reluctance to use the word landscape if a new word can be found in a philosopher's writings (taskscape), another discipline's jargon (*biotope*) or an alternative language (*Lebenswelt*). Without reconciliation – more interventionist editing of individual chapters might have helped – the tensions produced by conflicting theories can be destructive rather than constructive. The book also suffers from academia's habit (obligation?) of referring almost any statement to the higher authority of predecessors in the field (or preferably someone else's field), as an examiner's checklist is big ticked, even though most of the book's ideas are quite able to stand on their own feet.

The key idea underpinning landscape biography does not come from the sources above, however, but from an American geographer called Marwyn Samuels, who in 1979, in an essay entitled 'The biography of landscape', complained that landscape research paid insufficient attention to the role of people as the authors of landscape. He defined two relationships between people and landscape, which he labelled 'landscapes of impression' (the impact of individuals on the world) and 'landscapes of expression' (the impact of the world on their mentalities). Samuels's essay must however be seen in historical context. He was reacting to the 1960s and 1970s trend (especially in America) towards quantitative analysis. One reviewer of the book back in 1980 (the British geographer J. Wrexford Watson) captured this well, identifying

'... the need to get out into the field again and a chance to get back to the art of description. The eye has to see, and the mind has to savor! Data banks disgorged in computer mapping ... are no substitute for the discerning vision ... Landscapes are ... beyond statistics ... [a] high degree of art [is] needed to catch and to convey ... flavor of a place.'

But this is 2016. Even by the time Samuels was writing, the quantitative, anonymising approach was already fading away, and it was long dead by the mid 1990s when Samuel's essay, we are told was re-excavated by Dutch archaeologists. Geographers had enjoyed their cultural turn in the 1980s, the humanities and the social sciences as a whole have since the 1990s colonised the field of landscape, and '60s style 'new landscape archaeology' has by and large matured into a sophisticated range of engagement with landscape, as indeed this book shows. Is it any longer an urgent task to 're-humanise' landscape studies, or to rise to 'the challenge of reloading heritage practices with time depth and new notions of time and temporality' (p. 40)? Or are we already doing those things in a myriad ways (many demonstrated in the pages of this book) so that the new challenges lie elsewhere? This is not to say that the approaches demonstrated by this book are not deserving of future use. Rather it is to suggest that as well as reviving a 'long-neglected notion' (p. 345) from the 1970s which has only really been used over the past ten years or so (p. 403), we should also look for new 21st century approaches.

Marwyn Samuels does not have the field to himself, however. Michel de Certeau walks in it as well, and when they meet, some of the certainties of the book are challenged. For Samuels, it seems (following materiality), the 'authors' of landscapes of impressions were patrons, architects, great men, powerful individuals; for de Certeau (concerned with the intangible and the experienced), it is the everyday masses who are 'the real authors ... the ordinary practitioners' (p. 33), 'the anonymous mass of people, roaming its way' (p. 240), a step towards the anonymity that the biography approach is said to be set against. As a result the question of who is allowed to be an author is problematic in this book, at times reserving landscape creation to social elites, and allowing the concept of 'author' to slide rapidly towards 'ownership'. Implied too is a sense that not knowing someone's name (i.e. that they are literally anonymous) is the same as consigning them to an overlooked mass. W.G. Hoskins knew there were people behind every landscape change he saw, so did J.B. Jackson; they just did not always know their names. The risk of the Samuels biography approach is that we are pulled back into the great man (*sic*) view of history, a neglect of ordinary people in the search for patrons and philanthropists (to escape which was why many of us became archaeologists not historians). Fittingly, de Certeau's 'ordinary practitioners' are most evident (or implied) in the book's urban chapters but they can be found in every chapter: eighty villagers filled with 'ham sandwiches and as much beer as they could drink' at the Looward (p. 90), the Icelander '4x4-driving freedom fighters for travel' (p. 113-4), whoever lost an Arabic coin and a Coca-Cola can at Monte de Igreja in Alenteijo (p.172-3), and the teeming millions who

'made' Shanghai (even if sometimes only through the pages of a spy novel or a Marlene Dietrich film).

The editors tell us that 'landscapes also shape their own life-histories' (p. 21), a phrase that took me back to the words of another contributor to the same book that contains Samuels' essay: Peirce F. Lewis, another American geographer, the historian of New Orleans – 'our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography'. Thus the biography metaphor becomes almost ouroboric, probably because the notion that landscape has its own biography comes from yet a third guru, the American cultural anthropologist Igor Kopytoff, whose 1986 paper 'The Cultural Biography of Things – Commoditization as a Process' (written without apparent reference to Samuels) sends us down yet another path. So while many chapters present (human) biographies seen *within* a landscape, others offer us the biographies *of* landscape, similar to the impressive RCE-sponsored Atlases, such as that of Amsterdam. The fusion of Samuels' biography of landscape with Kopytoff's biography of things thus causes another interesting level of confusion. There has possibly been slightly more archaeological work following Kopytoff than Samuels, and a leading exponent of the life history approach (Cornelius Holtorf) writes a chapter here (on life history not biography). But he appears to distance himself from the idea that landscape can have a life history (or biography) because landscapes are parallel and successive, not singular and sequential. Another contributor, Rob der Laarse, seems to have doubts as well or at least wishes to go further, suggesting that its prevailing metaphor of 'layering' is inadequate to deal with landscape's complexities.

From all this we can take the thought that whatever else it does, landscape biography offers a splendid arena for reflective and critical approaches. Although some chapters half-imply that this biography approach can replace all others, I am sure the editors think it merely adds to the landscape research toolkit, and I would agree. As Holtorf invites us to think, landscape biography is 'in itself only one particular approach to landscape that has gained some currency in our time but that will also eventually be succeeded by other approaches' (p. 179).

But then the different chapters use varying approaches anyway. Particular chapters tell readers that landscape biography is a metaphor, others encourage them to see it as a theory, and others present it as a methodology. It is not always clear whether 'biography' was used during the research described or whether the results have been recast in its language. Terminology sometimes slides from biography to a range of near-synonyms such as portraiture, personality, character or identity. Thus the narrow metaphor of biography does not hold fast, but the wider one – that landscape is in some way like a person – does. All this diversity and freedom produces a valuable output, and

the tensions within the collection are at the end of the day constructive and thought-provoking. If my review has picked up on contradictions, it is because conflict and plurality are important in landscape study; landscape is not tolerant of interpretative closure. I have long thought that the skills developed over almost a century in 'reading landscape' are not yet matched by 'our' skills in 'writing landscape', but on the evidence of this book, landscape biography is a good step forward, one way of narrating landscape through the medium (to introduce yet another 'borrowed' idea, not I

think mentioned in the book) of Geertz-type 'thick' description. It may not be the final or only answer – in these examples at least it does not automatically generate the interdisciplinarity that has long been expected of landscape studies, and I worry about that the privileging of narrative seems to marginalise spatiality – but this rich book offers a way of creating fresh and engaging narratives of our landscapes.

GRAHAM FAIRCLOUGH



CLÉ LESGER

## HET WINKELLANDSCHAP VAN AMSTERDAM

### STEDELIJK STRUCTUUR EN WINKELBEDRIJF IN DE VROEGMODERNE EN MODERNE TIJD, 1550-2000

Hilversum (Verloren) 2013, 472 pp.; ill. in zwart-wit en kleur, ISBN 978 90 8704 373 5, € 40

Locatie. In de uitvoerige studie die historicus Clé Lesger heeft geschreven over viereneenhalve eeuw Amsterdams winkellandschap blijkt dit keer op keer een centrale factor voor de succesvolle exploitatie van een winkel in de stad. Of het nu gaat om de verkoop van dagelijks benodigde voedings- en genotmiddelen of om minder vaak aan te schaffen duurzame goederen, de uitbater van een winkel moet zich altijd rekenschap geven van waar hij welke producten aan de man brengt. Het is de grote verdienste van Lesger dat hij met zijn onderzoek de verbanden tussen het functioneren van de stad als economische ruimte en als fysiek bouwwerk over langere termijn heeft verduidelijkt en een aantal interessante constanten en enkele opvallende wijzingen in de dynamiek van de Amsterdamse

detailhandel blootlegt. Dat verhaal wordt verteld op een toegankelijke manier in heldere taal, waarmee een breed publiek kan worden bereikt. Toch wordt van de lezer wel enig doorzettingsvermogen gevraagd. En dat komt vooral door de breedte van het landschap dat Lesger schetst en de ambitie om zoiets omvangrijks als de geschiedenis van het Amsterdamse winkelbedrijf te willen maken en ruimtelijk te verklaren. Eigenlijk is het boek vooral zo dik geworden omdat het de geschiedenis van Amsterdam opnieuw vertelt vanuit het winkelbedrijf, waardoor het een algemene geschiedenis van Amsterdam combineert met een beschrijving van de belangrijkste stedenbouwkundige en demografische ontwikkelingen, gedetailleerd economisch-historisch onderzoek en een selectieve analyse van de ar-