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**Place and its Relations in Late Twentieth Century  
Cultural Theory and British Fiction**

**by**

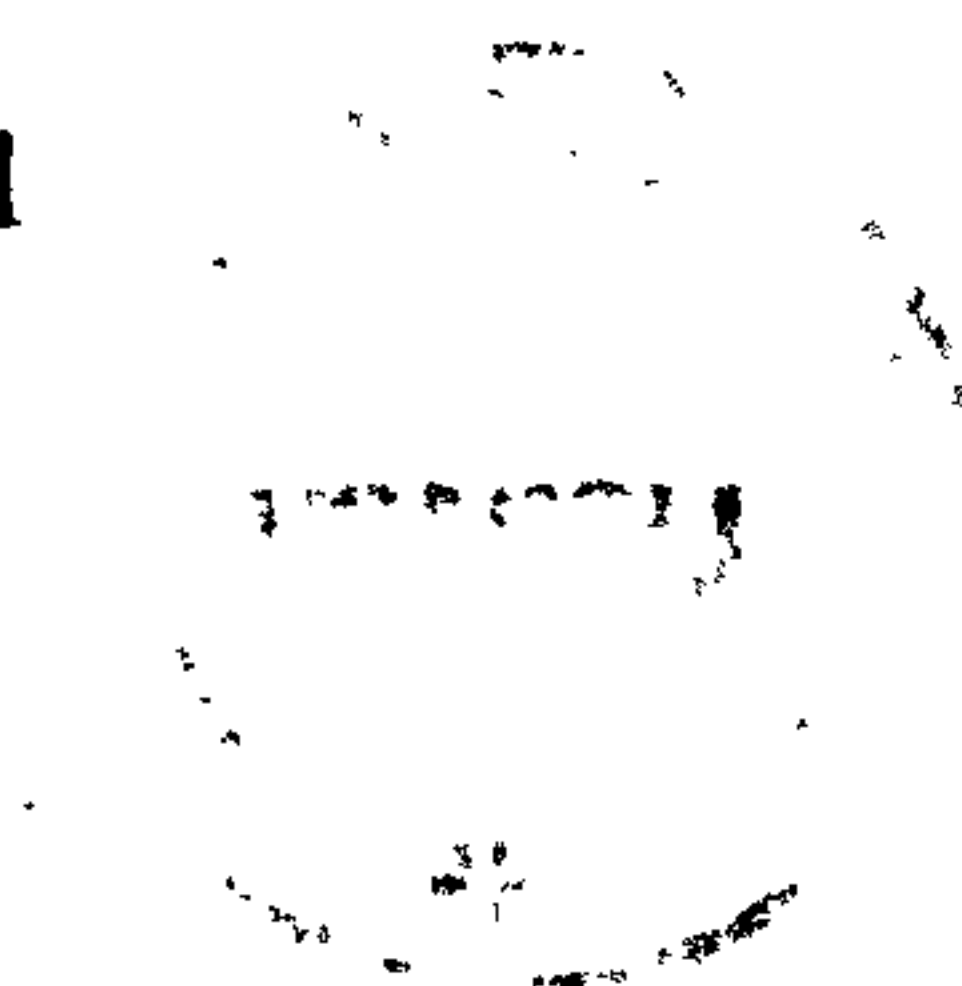
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in British and Cultural Studies

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the thesis submitted here is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## **Abstract**

The dissertation presents a descriptive analysis of aspects of British fictional writing prefaced by a comparative analysis of cultural theory concerned with questions of place and socio-spatial relations. The general aim is to show how both the theory and the fiction negotiate elements of a relational poetics and politics of place in the context of negatively homogenizing tendencies in socio-economic developments during the last thirty years of the twentieth century. In the first part, the writers of cultural theory are divided into three preliminary areas, covering primarily Marxist, post-structuralist and environmentalist approaches to questions of place and its relations. The second and third parts then provide more detailed consideration of novels by Raymond Williams and Iain Sinclair which have so far not been accorded substantial critical attention. The aim is to show how their approaches in the novels considered converge with aspects of the theory discussed in the opening part of the dissertation. In all cases, the writers are presented as producing 'partial mappings'. These are seen as offering perspectives of sufficient scope to provide effective criticism of, and possible alternatives to, negative and disorientating aspects of social relations affected by tendencies in capital accumulation which might be seen as endangering elements of social justice and equality, cultural heterogeneity, and ecological viability. The first part includes consideration of the poet Charles Olson and a related aim is to suggest how novels such as those by Williams and Sinclair might provide a significant complement to both theory and modern epic poetry in relation to questions of place.

## **Introduction**

The aim of this study is to explore, examine and compare aspects of the content and form of a series of perspectives on the cultural significance of place and its relations. The relations referred to here are understood in terms of both concepts and of verbal or written discourses or narratives which offer a presentation or interpretation of the significance of place and closely related concepts. The forms of discourse focused on are those of cultural theory and the novel, although a very limited consideration of certain aspects of poetry is also included.

Place, as word or concept, has numerous connotations. It usually signifies some sort of fixed point but this can vary in size and complexity from the head of a pin to the cosmos. Nevertheless, the attendant notion of fixedness means that place, or places, can be invested with both positive and negative meanings. Positive connotations are of security, stability and meaningfulness. Negative connotations tend to be of oppression, repression and the related desire to escape from the place in question. A common meaning is that of specific geographical location, whether a town, or village, or some other significant part of the landscape, large or small. But there are many others. 'To know one's place' is a phrase usually understood in relation to conservative notions of social hierarchy. A common dictionary definition is that relating to an open space or public square, *the* place for people from a community to meet, do their trading, air their differences and perform festivities. To place something can signify simply to put it in a given position but it can also mean to situate it in a context which gives it meaning - a form of orientation.



Another way of initially considering the meaning of place is by way of contrast with that of space. Space is a concept comparable with place in the broadness of its range of connotations as well as its semantic proximity. If place is suggestive of fixedness, limitation, closure and meaning, space is more suggestive of openness and freedom to move, but also of emptiness and lack of meaning or orientation. This is to deal with notions such as place and space at an introductory level, though both concepts have long and involved cultural and philosophical histories.<sup>1</sup> The aim here is to explore aspects of these concepts in relation to certain preoccupations in later twentieth century thinking and cultural production. This involves an encounter with the other type of relation referred to, that of verbal and written discourse. The discourses in question are referred to in the title as 'cultural theory' and 'British fiction'. 'Cultural theory' as used here refers to writing by a variety of thinkers from different academic disciplines and countries. 'British fiction' primarily refers to aspects of the work of two writers, Raymond Williams and Iain Sinclair, both born in Wales, one currently commanding a greater reputation as a cultural critic and theorist, the other also a practising poet. Both have developed long-term writing projects primarily focused on the nature and concerns of a particular place or region.

The theoretical and fictional writing discussed here was mostly produced between 1970 and 2000, though some attention is paid to earlier writing where it is considered relevant. Analysis and discussion of the theory is intended, in part, to provide a context for that of the fiction. The cultural theory considered is taken as

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<sup>1</sup> See Casey (1997) for a more detailed discussion of the significance of place and related concepts in philosophical thinking from the earliest times to the late twentieth century.

representative of three broad orientations towards questions of place and its relations. These can be characterised in terms of the emphasis placed, respectively, on questions of social emancipation and justice, questions of difference and its expression and repression, and questions connected to human relations with the earth. The work of the two writers of fiction is partly considered in relation to these categorisations but also in broader terms and in greater detail. In all cases, the primary emphasis is on how the writers considered approach questions of place and its relations and on comparisons between their approaches. A related concern is the question of how the two novelists provide dramatisations of issues raised by cultural theory, as well as by poetry, in ways which offer the possibility of a link between these relatively specialised forms of discourse and more generally accessible forms of cultural production.

It has already been noted that positive connotations of place include a sense of security and stability and that other close relations of place to be considered are those of space, region and the earth. The significance of these categories might be seen as reaching a peak towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century with developments usually included under the general heading of Romanticism. In Wordsworth, the primary paradigmatic figure of British Romantic poetry, place as restorative, wild and unspoilt nature, particularly in the form of his native region, takes on an enormous, positive significance.

Wordsworth's approach towards nature and place might be seen as partly indicative of a retreat from a more radical stance towards questions of social and political emancipation taken in the earlier part of his career.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand,

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<sup>2</sup> See Roe (1988) for a discussion of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's radical early years. More recently, Jonathan Bate (1991) has attempted to interpret the significance of nature in

the notion of places as repressive, haunted, gothic spaces is also a major characteristic of writing produced by politically radical writers, including Blake, whose evocation of a 'chartered' London indicates a closely related side of place as oppressive and constricting.<sup>3</sup>

Such perceptions might be related further back in time to attitudes towards the settlement reached in the years after 1688 and their ambivalence towards the values it represented. Modern Britain and its literature, particularly the novel, might be seen as substantially furthering their development at about this time with writers expressing both positive and negative attitudes towards what were perceived as the dominant values of the new dispensation, as critics such as John Lucas and Patrick Brantlinger have shown, in relation to poetry and the novel respectively.<sup>4</sup> Interpretations of place could include attitudes of dismay and resentment towards what were perceived as modern, bourgeois values of money, commerce and credit, rather than the older ones of inherited land and position and religious faith. Alternative values could also be expressed in terms of a more radically egalitarian politics, as the sentiments expressed in the prose and poetry of radicals from the time of the civil war through to that of Blake and beyond, indicate.

Attitudes to place can be seen as expressing sentiments relating both to the earth and to questions of social organization and hierarchy. They can also be related to

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Wordsworth's poetry in relation to the development of an ecologically focused literary criticism.

<sup>3</sup> See Mighall (1999) for a recent study of later nineteenth century Gothic fiction, focusing more specifically on spatial considerations.

<sup>4</sup> See Lucas (1990) and Brantlinger (1996)

questions of region and nation. Sir Walter Scott's novels are usually taken as a major contributory factor in the rise of the historical novel and its relation to the return or development of subordinated regions into areas of independent national sovereignty in Europe. The 'revival' of national identities, at the level of literary and other forms of cultural representation, is a significant feature of poetry as well as the novel in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Studies such as those by Lucas and Isobel Armstrong show that later nineteenth century poetry is far from devoid of a politics of place and its relations.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, in the twentieth century that radical attempts to connect poetry with place and politics in opposition to developments in both capitalism and imperialism become particularly evident in ways which directly concern the texts under consideration here. The figures of Pound and Yeats stand out as representative in this respect. Yeats presented a notion of the ancient bard as the voice and experience of a revived nation.<sup>6</sup> Pound provided a challenging version of the poet as capable of understanding, using and contesting the language and complexities of modern capitalism. In both cases, these powerful and distinctive voices might be seen as both reactionary and elitist in the epic visions of world history that they provide. They might also be seen as being complemented by the work of Martin Heidegger, a philosopher particularly interested in the poetic element in language and in the degeneration of human relations to the earth. All three of these writers might be viewed, retrospectively, as providing reactionary approaches to questions of place and identity in a world increasingly dominated by the flows of international capital and related developments in technology and

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<sup>5</sup> See Lucas (1990) and Armstrong (1993).

<sup>6</sup> See Kiberd (1996) and McCormack (1994) for perspectives on Yeats's poetics and politics.

efficiently bureaucratic, often imperialistic, versions of the state.<sup>7</sup> These three figures have been singled out for mention here, as have Wordsworth and Blake earlier, since they can be seen as influential on the work of Charles Olson, a poet who, in the context of the latter half of the twentieth century, promoted an especially ambitious poetics and politics of place.

Olson, like Pound, perhaps the single most telling influence on his work, presented an epic, historical vision grounded in ferocious antagonism to the values of modern capital as evinced in the workings of the contemporary American nation. Involved in professional politics and politically radical in his earlier verse, Olson moved, during the course of the three volumes of his later epic, *The Maximus Poems*, published between 1960 and 1970, to a more distanced and mystical, if still politically attentive stance, basing himself in a removed spot, virtually offshore, in the fishing port of Gloucester, Massachusetts. From there he projected an alternative history of America and an alternative mapping of the world to those provided by the accumulative requirements of modern capital. He would also seem to have been responsible for one of the earliest, relatively consistent uses of the term 'postmodern'.<sup>8</sup> The relevance of both Olson and Heidegger to the arguments presented here is explored in greater detail later. At this point, it can be observed that Olson provides an ambitious example of a place-based poetic whose politics are radically anti-capitalist, though not easily identifiable with the extremes of either reactionary conservatism or dogmatic Marxism. At the same time, his work is increasingly exilic and mystical in its approach and is arguably even more intimidatingly specialised than that of

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<sup>7</sup> Bernstein (1980) provides a comparative study of Pound, Williams and Olson as modern epic poets.

predecessors such as Pound. Figures of modernist, bardic nationalism or regionalism also occur in the British context, in the work of writers such as David Jones, Basil Bunting and Hugh MacDiarmid. These writers have influenced more recent developments in British neo-modernist poetry with a focused attention on issues of place, as represented by Allen Fisher, J.H. Prynne and others.<sup>9</sup> In most cases, though, despite, and perhaps because of, the range and ambition of their work and the potential significance of a place-based politics of difference, radically challenging the dominant conformities of capital and the modern state, a major problem has been that of accessibility to more than a very limited number of readers.

Poetry has not been the only form of discourse to offer alternative mappings of the world and its history to challenge the increasing dominance of both international capital and the centralised state. The twentieth century has seen comparable attempts in cultural theory to challenge what is perceived as the negative influence of capitalist value systems on human societies and their relation to one another and the earth. Many of the most influential early elements of such theorising to be discussed here have their source in countries other than Britain. In relation to the earlier part of the century, Heidegger has already been mentioned. His work is contemporaneous with that of the Frankfurt School and writers related to it. Walter Benjamin as cultural analyst of place in the form of the urban appears as a particularly significant figure, both appalled and fascinated by the production of an alternative form of nature designed along purely commercial principles.

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<sup>8</sup> Bertens (1995:20-21) and Anderson (1998) both note Olson's early use of the term.

<sup>9</sup> See Hampson & Barry (1993) for a relevant survey of developments. Corcoran (1993: 176-177) also suggests connections between 'neo-modernists' like Prynne and the poetry of Jones and Bunting.

This is not to suggest that elements of a cultural theory of place and its relations were not simultaneously being developed in the English-speaking world, on either side of the Atlantic. Ruskin and Morris are perhaps the most visible representatives of an alternative vision of social organization which took a strong interest in questions of architecture and urban planning. This was later developed by figures like Patrick Geddes and Ebenezer Howard. In the 1960s, primarily in the United States, a new explosion of concern about issues relating to modern urban planning occurred, as indicated by studies such as Mumford's *The City in History* (1960), Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1966). In the mid-seventies the beginnings of a more general theoretical concern with the social and cultural significance of place and space became more apparent with the appearance of books such as Raymond Williams's *The Country and The City* (1973), David Harvey's *Social Justice and the City* (1973), Henri Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace* (1974) and Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976). Aspects of the work of the first three of these writers are covered later, but some consideration of the concerns of Relph's book is useful at this stage.

Unlike the approach of the other three studies referred to, Relph's is not primarily Marxist in orientation and might be considered as a broadening of the approach presented in the objections to modernist urban planning raised in the studies by Mumford, Jacobs and Lynch. Relph's primary concern in the book is with the loss of an adequate sense of place. He furnishes his reader with a list of

'manifestations' of the phenomenon of placelessness. These consist of ways in which places are negatively 'other-directed' by being appropriately beautified in standardised fashion for the purposes of tourism, a process Relph sees as one of turning authentic places into synthetic or pseudo-places. He sees similar processes of uniformity and standardisation at work in the creation of instant 'new towns', suburbs and motorways. He also worries about 'formlessness and lack of human scale' and the 'impermanence or instability of places'. He further suggests that the media, mass culture, big business, multinational corporations, central authorities of the state and the economic system in general are responsible for the development of such tendencies.<sup>10</sup> His characterisation of place, as opposed to placelessness, depends on a distinction between 'outside' and 'inside' and includes factors of time, community, personal or private places, rootedness, care and a sense of place as home.<sup>11</sup> His approach to place leans towards, sometimes refers to, Heidegger and in this respect might be regarded as nearing the dubiously essentialistic. At the same time, it usefully and methodically formulates a series of observations that many people may have arrived at in more intuitive and dispersed fashions.

A later but comparable approach, though with a strong Marxist inflection, is provided in Frederic Jameson's wide-ranging evocations of a 'postmodern sublime' and the need for a form of 'cognitive mapping'.<sup>12</sup> Jameson characterises the socio-cultural fabric of late twentieth century capitalist socio-economic relations as a form of cognitive disorientation which discourages thinking about any one thing long enough to invest it with any critical, historical significance.

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<sup>10</sup> See Relph (1976:118-121)

<sup>11</sup> For characterisations of 'inside' and 'outside' see Relph (1976: 49-61)



The world of late capitalism is presented as a huge conspiracy of images which can only be resisted by a determined historical, materialist hermeneutics that can still succeed in perceiving processes of social exploitation and emancipation in the apparently endless present of late twentieth century consumer capital. The themes of deception and disorientation central to Jameson's depiction of life and culture under late twentieth century capitalism are characteristic of a long tradition of Marxist criticism, and not far away from the scenario of a commercially driven second nature pictured by Benjamin and others in the earlier part of the century. Jameson's observations as a cultural analyst have been complemented by developments in the field of geography. The notion of space as socially constructed rather than neutral perhaps owes as much to the cultural theorist Henri Lefebvre's interventions as to those of geographers but they have subsequently developed it in various ways.

The best known disciple of Lefebvre, in the British and American contexts has been David Harvey. *Social Justice and the City* (1973) charts his progress from a liberal and descriptive approach to urban development to one which, inspired by Marx, takes as one of its major premises that the function of geography should not be merely to describe the world but to change it. Consequently, in the later part of this book and in subsequent publications, Harvey pursued a Marxist analysis of urban development which placed more stress on broader socio-economic processes and their political significance. These analyses developed a distinctly cultural turn with the publication of *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990). The study was one of a number published at around this time by writers of Marxist

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<sup>12</sup> See Jameson (1988) and Jameson (1991)

orientation eager to challenge the notion that the increasing use of the term postmodernity meant that we were entering a new era in which notions of continuity and history had little meaning.<sup>13</sup> In some respects, Harvey's study provided an excellent example of the kind of 'cognitive mapping' for which Jameson had been calling. It provided an overview of relationships between modernism and postmodernism but then placed them in the context of socio-economic developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as presented from a Marxist perspective. The conclusion reached was that postmodernism and postmodernity were no more than subtle shifts in a cynical organization of socio-economic relations. Processes of capital accumulation in the richer parts of the world had been obliged, due to major changes in market conditions, to adapt themselves to more flexible and finely tuned forms of production and exploitation of resources, making them more sensitive to fine distinctions of difference between one area and another.

Harvey's approach included an aggressively polemical attack on celebrations of difference and discontinuity, as presented in the work of a variety of French philosophers, including Lyotard, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari. The immediate attack was on Lyotard's notion of seeing the postmodern condition as one of scepticism towards previously accepted meta-narratives, with Harvey insisting, as Jameson had been in more hermeneutical terms, on the need for a strong narrative to counter that of capitalism and its over-exploitative organisation of social relations. Part of the significance of Harvey's approach stemmed from the fact that, while analyses of the nature of postmodernity were numerous, he

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<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Jameson (1988) ; Lash and Urry (1987)

presented a perspective from the field of geography, rather than that of literary and cultural studies or sociology. During the nineties, analyses of the social and cultural significance of space by geographers, began to be a generally more visible phenomenon.

Among contributions to this development was one by Neil Smith, suggesting that one way of approaching a manageable mapping of space as socially constructed was by means of 'scaling places'; that is to say, considering space at different levels, from that of the body, through levels such as home, community, urban and region, to nation and globe.<sup>14</sup> Smith's focus on different levels of socially constructed spatial experience comes out of controversies in geography about the relative significance of space and place as socially and culturally significant phenomena.<sup>15</sup> In 1991 David Harvey gave a paper entitled '*From Space to Place and Back Again*' which raised, for geographers like Doreen Massey, the unnecessary return to a dialogue with what she saw as the mystical essentialism of philosophers like Heidegger. Massey offered in place of the dialectical relationship between space and place presented by Harvey, a flexible or progressive sense of place, where, as in her adopted home of Kilburn, boundaries were anything but clearly defined.<sup>16</sup> However, writers such as Martyn Lee, working in the field of cultural studies, in turn questioned this approach, suggesting that places were strongly defined by their geographical situation and history, an approach partly suggested by Massey's own work in her earlier study,

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<sup>14</sup> See Smith (1993: 102-115)

<sup>15</sup> See Cloke et al. (1991) for a survey of these developments

<sup>16</sup> Details of the conference and versions of the relevant papers can be found in Bird et al. (1993)

*Spatial Divisions of Labour*, which posited the notion of ‘layers’ in connection with specific areas and their future possibilities for attracting capital investment.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of place tends to have stronger support in writers less inclined to Marxist interpretations of space and place and more sympathetic to the continuing significance of Heidegger’s views, as was observed in the case of Edward Relph. Nor is it a notion whose significance is observed only by geographers. If space as socially constructed tends to be a notion particularly attractive to Marxist geographers, sociologists and cultural theorists, place is a notion which is of evident significance to writers of poetry and fiction as well as philosophy. Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* is one example of this, another is Edward Casey’s philosophical history ‘*The Fate of Place*’ (1997), which suggests that a more holistic notion of place was gradually usurped by more scientific and exploitative notions of space but is now making a comeback, partly due to developments in phenomenology and process philosophy and, most recently, in the work of French post-structuralist thinkers from Derrida to Deleuze and Guattari and Irigaray.

Casey raises the question, raised in one form or another by most of the writers referred to here, of how to produce a narrative, or what might also be termed a poetics and politics, which is sufficiently coherent to challenge the exploitative fragmentation of social space seen as characteristic of capitalist social relations but flexible enough to allow for various forms of difference. These range from questions of gender, sexuality, and age to social class, ethnicity and belief, and apply not only to people but to places. In this respect, they are also an ecological

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<sup>17</sup> See Massey (1995:320-321).

question. Nikolas Entrikin (1991), in his study of the recent history of geography as chorology, the study of place, notes the way in which it occupies an uneasy position between more scientific, objective, analytical aspirations and the need to develop a synthesising humanistic narrative which helps to create as much as analyse notions of place. Cultural philosophers and historians such as Arran Gare and Paul Carter, to focus on two writers whose approach to place is considered in more detail here, pay particular attention to relations between cultural and philosophical perspectives and human relations with the earth.

In an article on the developing discipline of ecocriticism and its relation to the novel, Dominic Head suggests that the concerns of ecology tend to be predominantly with relations between humans and the non-human environment, whereas those of the novel are usually with relations between people, relations to their environment taking a secondary role.<sup>18</sup> Commenting on one of Lawrence Buell's 'requirements for an environmentally oriented work', that 'the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in a natural history', Head observes that 'Raymond Williams's unfinished trilogy *People of the Black Mountains* (in which narrative continuity is supplied by place rather than character) could be read as a major experiment in support of this ecocentric principle, but it is hard to conceive of the novel as a genre reinventing itself in this way.' (Head 1998: 67).

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<sup>18</sup> See Head (1998:60-73)

*People of the Black Mountains* is one of the novels which is treated in detail here, as are Iain Sinclair's first two novels. In both cases, it is argued that novels like these might be treated as a bridge between the even more demanding discourses of modern epic poetry and cultural theory and more immediately accessible novels like Swift's *Waterland*.<sup>19</sup> Rather than thinking in terms of a single paradigm for the novel, it may be more useful to chart a series of contiguous positions on a more varied, never more than partially completed and constantly changing cultural map. To present such an approach to novels such as those written by Williams and Sinclair is perhaps to spatialise a more historically-oriented perspective which sees them as part of the later phase of an arcane, elitist cultural modernism that would also include Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, and large-scale theoretical works such as Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* or Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. In opposition to this viewpoint, it will be suggested here that it is more helpful to see them as forming useful points of transition between the formal difficulties presented by large-scale, modernist pieces of writing and those which are more accessible to a wider readership. This approach might in itself be seen as a form of literary and cultural ecology, one which insists on the value of interconnected diversity in these areas. The texts by Raymond Williams and Iain Sinclair considered here are usually classified, reasonably enough, as novels but, in the case of at least two of the novels considered, Williams's *People of the Black Mountains* and Sinclair's *Downriver*, there is a considerable divergence from the general norms of narrative organization in the modern novel and an interestingly proximate relation to aspects of twentieth century epic poetry and cultural theory. At the same time, since both pieces of writing are usually classified as novels,

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<sup>19</sup> Head makes an interesting case for seeing *Waterland* as a particularly effective novel from an eco-critical perspective. See Head (1998:70-71)

some introductory comments relating the genre to issues of place, space, region and the earth, as with poetry and cultural theory, would seem appropriate at this stage.

Writing about place might be seen in certain respects as intrinsic to the more documentary and voyeuristic aspects of the novel, one of whose characteristics as a genre is to provide accounts of experience otherwise inaccessible to most readers. *Robinson Crusoe* provides an account of a very different place from its readers' native land which appears to endorse the social psychology of its domination by a representative figure of the emerging modern British, Protestant, increasingly capitalist and imperialist state. In other writing, Defoe also provides an extensive tour of the home country and various depictions of its capital, London, soon to be the world's largest and most powerful metropolis. One could go further back in time, to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* to focus on the different kinds of itinerary, spiritual and material, involved in the various tours and journeys made in different novels. The most famous journeys in this respect, again belong to epic poetry, whether Dante's *Divina Commedia* or Homer's *Odyssey*. More recent versions of such journeys, of comparable literary fame, in the English-speaking context would perhaps most obviously include Melville's *Moby Dick*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, or Kerouac's *On the Road*. Clearly, it would not be difficult to provide a much longer list, although the aim here is not to suggest that all the most significant novels of the last three hundred years are concerned with journeys, even if many of them are primarily concerned with providing a representation and interpretation of (a) life's journey.

The distinction between map and journey made by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* is discussed in more detail later, as are the notions of nomadism and lines of flight elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Declan Kiberd, in his reading of modern Irish history and literature, *Inventing Ireland*, an alternative history and mapping of Irish culture in itself, makes use of these and related Deleuzoguattarian concepts. He claims that Joyce, as a writer developing in the context of a nation struggling to gain its independence from British colonialism, is more at ease with the short story than the novel: ‘The short story genre promised Joyce an escape, a line of flight from the formal inappropriateness of the novel, which was calibrated to a settled society than one still in the settling.’ (Kiberd 1996:330). Kiberd goes on to point out that this promise proved at least partially illusory, but the comparison between story and novel is a significant one, raised also by Benjamin in his essay, *The Storyteller*, where the novel is presented as being primarily a form of information transmission, in contrast to the more open form of discursive structure presented by the tale, which allows the reader to make their own interpretation of what is related.<sup>20</sup> These observations are of particular relevance to an analysis of two of Williams’s *People of the Black Mountains* and Sinclair’s *Downriver*, since both consist of a series of connected episodes rather than a more unified form of narrative focused on the experiences of a relatively limited number of characters. Joyce’s ‘novel’ *Ulysses*, perhaps the most spectacular example of a challenge to more conventional forms of novel writing, also focuses on the exploration of a particular place, but this time a known place which is only a few years from liberation from colonial rule rather than about to fall under its sway. In these

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<sup>20</sup> See Benjamin (1992:87-89)



respects, it shares some characteristics with Sinclair's approach to London.

Sinclair operates with a more self-consciously gothic, haunted sense of place. He makes connections with a whole tradition of gothic writing about place from the work of early writers of gothic fiction to Stevenson, Stoker, Conrad and other writers who explored the ethnic complexities of the imperial metropolis and, in the case of Conrad, its relation to a broader colonial and economic system. This relation between disadvantaged, paralysed and repressed places and a broader system of socio-economic relations is, again, an element of concern shared by the novels, poetry and theory considered here.

To return to the notion of wandering and the journey in an unknown or partly known place, as opposed to the mapping of a dominated space, both Williams and Sinclair, in the novels considered here, operate with comparable figures, as do many of the writers of the cultural theory. The kinds of movement in place and reflective wandering presented in Williams and Sinclair's fictional writing offer an alternative form of place creation - one which provides different histories and mappings to those presented by a dominant culture of exploitative, accumulative capital and the needs, in the British context, of a considerably but not totally post-imperial state whose grip on outlying regions and cities may need to be loosened further.

These are issues, and approaches to them, which occur in the theoretical as much as the fictional writing. Aspects of the cultural theory are considered and compared in the first part, providing a more global

context. They are then related to a specifically British context in connection with aspects of the fictional writing of Williams and Sinclair. In the case of Williams, a single novel, *People of the Black Mountains* is focused on, since Williams's fictional work has been the subject of at least one major study, and it is his last novel which provides a particularly interesting comparison with aspects of modern epic poetry, such as that of Olson. In the case of Sinclair, the focus provided is slightly broader and related more to the earlier work, both because it was published at about the same time as Williams's later fictional writing and because critical analysis of Sinclair's work does not yet appear to be at the same stage of development. In the cases of both the theoretical and the fictional writing the aim is to outline and consider the significance of both convergences and divergences of interest in the different approaches.

In more general terms, the main objective is to provide a contribution to a more sensitively relational poetics and politics of place, space, region and the earth. As David Harvey points out, developments in the later twentieth century have created a situation where even accumulative capital is highly sensitive to the specificities of place, even if this is for exploitative reasons.<sup>21</sup> The theoretical perspectives explored and compared here are seen as relevant to developing a poetics and politics that can help to shape a global space which is not dangerously over-dominated by ecologically and socially insensitive aspects of capital accumulation but which is also attentive to the dangers of producing essentialistic, nostalgic and

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<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Harvey (1990:295-296)

reactionary characterisations of place. The fictional writing of the two British authors is presented as potentially occupying a particular, if inevitably shifting, kind of space, close to that of modern epic poetry and aspects of the theory considered earlier. All of these kinds of writing are ambitious in scope, providing a poetic of a scale to conceptually challenge the power of global capital and the modern state as potentially negatively homogenising processes, but they also make highly specialised demands on their readers. Novels such as those by Williams and Sinclair considered here are argued to complement theory and poetry of the kinds mentioned but also as having the potential to act as a bridge between them and more generally accessible forms of discourse, from more 'serious' but still considerably popular novels, by writers such as Swift and McEwan, to popular genre fiction, forms of television drama, or elements of other forms of cultural production which have indicated the possibility of developing a greater attentiveness to the significance and potential of place and its relations. Many of these forms have tended to focus primarily on individuals, the family and their relations with the state and other institutions but with a relatively limited degree of specificity with regard to the places, spaces, even regions, in which these relations unfold. The argument presented here is that the perspectives considered might contribute to a more complex and sensitive understanding of and relations between different places or socio-spatial levels. Large-scale and oppositional or subversive works, such as those considered here, have the potential to provide substantial, if partial, mappings and alternative histories of particular areas, which can provide useful connections

between them and help to negotiate their relationship with more powerful and potentially negative trends in the socio-spatial development and impositions of accumulative capital.

# **Part One**

## **Chapter One : Place as Social Space**

This chapter focuses on aspects of the work of two writers, the French cultural philosopher Henri Lefebvre and the British urban and cultural geographer, David Harvey. The discussion is prefaced by a brief consideration of aspects of Walter Benjamin's writing on cities. These writers present an approach to problems of commodification and homogenisation in urban life and social space which is primarily Marxist in character and focuses on issues of social emancipation, justice and equality.

### **1.1. Walter Benjamin's Cities**

Walter Benjamin would, in many ways, seem to have been as interested in places, particularly cities and their streets and buildings, as in literary texts. Even Benjamin's earliest major work, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, includes a strongly architectural element, particularly towards the end where the ruins of an existing state of affairs are seen as having the potential to lead to a catastrophic breakdown that will lead to something better.<sup>1</sup>

This is a characteristic motif in Benjamin's work. As Susan Buck-Morss points out in her analysis of the Arcades Project, the early work on tragic

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<sup>1</sup> See Benjamin (1977). Originally published in 1928. References to texts written by Benjamin, and to those by other writers whose work was originally published in a language other than English, are always to the translation into English.

drama has as much to say about the present as the past.<sup>2</sup> The baroque dramatists Benjamin discusses wander among a wilderness of signs, finding refuge from meaninglessness only in death and the hope of a better life beyond the earthly one. As Benjamin's later work shows, there are parallels here with the state of the modern capitalist economy which similarly disorientates its consumers with a phantasmagoric, commodified 'second nature'.

As Buck-Morss points out, Benjamin's work on seventeenth century tragic drama does, however, remain trapped within the interiors of a musty academia inside of which Benjamin ultimately felt incapable of remaining.<sup>3</sup> It is in the essays included in *One Way Street* that an escape begins to take place.<sup>4</sup> This is evident in the overall form of 'One-Way Street' and particularly its opening section. The whole consists of a series of short pieces, mini-feuilletons - the verbal equivalent of exceptionally sophisticated picture postcards. These work like expanded slogans in contrast to the long, involved meditative continuity of the earlier book. The opening section is entitled 'Filling Station', a reference to something which is at once outside, a building, a piece of machinery, and an aid to movement. The piece does not describe an actual filling station but refers to the currently sterile state of life and culture and the 'oil' of convictions and opinions, in contrast to essentially meaningless facts, that will be needed to get German social and cultural life going again. One of the longest sections

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<sup>2</sup> Buck-Morss (1991: 6)

<sup>3</sup> Buck-Morss (1991:17)

in 'One-Way Street' is 'Imperial Panorama', an equally provocative analysis of the disastrous state of German society. The feeling of claustrophobia and the need for freedom is communicated with particular intensity in the paragraphs of this section and it is almost as if a later section 'Travel Souvenirs' allows its reader to escape from this situation, like a tourist on holiday from the crisis at home.

These perceptions are more powerfully interconnected in a series of essays on the cities of Naples, Moscow, Marseilles, Berlin and then in the unfinished project on Paris. Here we find Benjamin directly involved with a complexly impressionistic analysis of the meaning of the city in various contexts. The first essay, on Naples, is co-authored with Ajsa Lacis, to whom 'One-Way Street' is dedicated. It is as if escape needs to occur at a personal, emotional level as well as that of the intellect. Here the movement, swirl and transitivity of the city's life is emphasized as much as its poverty, backwardness, crime and superstition. In contrast to the Germany invoked in 'Imperial Panorama', people can communicate with one another in forms of porous collectivity where the private and the public intermingle:

True laboratories of this great process of intermingling are the cafes. Life is unable to sit down and stagnate in them. They are sober, open rooms resembling the political People's Cafe, and the opposite of everything Viennese, of the confined, bourgeois, literary world.

(Benjamin 1979: 176)

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<sup>4</sup> References are to Benjamin (1979: 167-222, 293-346) The essays were originally written as follows: 'One Way Street (1925-26), Naples (1925), Moscow (1927), Marseilles (1929), (Berlin



Open, active movement is contrasted with the sedentary seductions of German, or in this case Austrian, bourgeois culture. Naples might be an old city but it offers possibilities for the future. The possibility of that future is glimpsed more fully in the essay on Moscow, revolutionary city of the future par excellence. Benjamin acknowledges his role as outside observer, but not in any negative sense: 'More quickly than Moscow itself, one gets to know Berlin through Moscow.' (177). This thought is expanded in terms of the relation of reading the 'image of the city and its people' in relation to 'the intellectual situation.' (177). This time the fullness and rapidity of life on the streets of Moscow is contrasted with the slowness and emptiness of Berlin (178). As with the visit to Naples, and as in sections of 'One Way Street', childhood is also revisited. In Moscow this is done in terms of walking: 'The instant one arrives the childhood stage begins. On the thick sheet of ice of the streets walking has to be relearned.' (179). The picture of revolutionary Moscow Benjamin paints amounts in many respects to what Henri Lefebvre terms a 'rhythmanalysis'<sup>5</sup> This was conceived in fascination at an open laboratory of social experience where everything, at least for a while, seems to be possible – a street-car ride, for instance, teaches Benjamin about the intermingling of modes and speeds of peasant movement and those of recent technologies.<sup>6</sup>

The next city to be considered is Marseilles. Here the first of two essays is preceded by a quotation from the work of Bréton and one is reminded

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1932-33)

<sup>5</sup> See Lefebvre (1991: 205-207)

<sup>6</sup> See Benjamin (1979:190-191)

of the proximity of Benjamin's more futurist and Marxist approach in these essays to that of the surrealism for which he had considerable admiration and to which he also devoted an essay.<sup>7</sup> In the first essay we have a series of picture-postcard reflections, in the second, 'Hashish in Marseilles' a more specific experiment where Benjamin takes his escape a stage further, by smoking a limited amount of hashish and then wandering the streets of Marseilles. Here he is again able to find the sense of open movement and community lacking in his native land and city.

The final essay in this series is the longer and more reflective one on Berlin, 'A Berlin Chronicle'. Here we seem to move back not merely to Berlin but to a past of ghosts and interiors. The opening sentence summons up spirits of the past while at the same time celebrating a discovery: 'Now let me call back those who introduced me to the city.' (293). We are again returned to childhood and learning not so much to walk as to gain a sense of direction and orientation. This line of thinking evolves into reflections on the fantasy of mapping life the way one might map a city: 'I have long, indeed for years, played with the idea of setting out the sphere of life – bios – on a map.' (295). One might suggest that this comes to partial fruition in the massive complex of configurations produced in Benjamin's research into the streets and arcades of Paris. The essay on Berlin proceeds to a reflection on the work of Proust, a figure of Paris, but one here invoked in terms of his use of personal memory, with which this essay is so much concerned. In Berlin, we have, for the first time, a place with which Benjamin has long been intimately connected,

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<sup>7</sup> 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intellegentsia', in Benjamin (1979::235-239)

to which he can relate the memories which stem from events and processes which occurred there and in which he was personally involved.

The essay on Berlin is no less impressive in the perceptive, precise and urbane communication of Benjamin's fascinations with the city than are the other essays. It has, though, a considerably different modality, in the way that it is saturated with reflections on past, personal experiences. The melancholy of the earlier work reappears. At one point Benjamin even recalls sitting writing his book on tragic drama.<sup>8</sup> We seem to move towards an archaeology of the various levels of the past buried in the history of cities, rather than a more simple celebration of their future possibilities. This continues in the examination of Baudelaire's poetry and its contemporary relevance, as well as much else besides, in the writing on Paris and its arcades. The essay ends on an arrestingly enigmatic note and here it would seem pertinent to quote the last two sentences rather than just the final one:

But that evening I must have memorized my room and my bed, as one observes exactly a place where one feels dimly that one will later have to search for something one has forgotten there.

Many years afterward I discovered what I had 'forgotten', a part of the news that my father had broken to me in that room: that the illness was called syphilis. (Benjamin 1979: 346)

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<sup>8</sup> See Benjamin (1979:313)

The more intriguing sentence here is perhaps the first, which contains the generalisation that precedes the concrete actuality. Something is recorded unconsciously, felt 'dimly' but not articulated in conscious thought; relation to places is as much unconscious as conscious. Rather as with Benjamin's analysis of contemporary German social trends, the thought is connected to death, disease and corruption.

A number of general points can be made in relation to the significance of Benjamin's work for the subsequent discussion. His approach involves not merely writing about culture beyond the literary text and getting out into the transitive actualities of the streets of cities, but also adopting a complexly impressionistic style which is capable of picking up the mosaic of surface details. He eventually forces these into a configuration that offers the hope, if not the promise, of a fuller chaos that will produce redemption from the organised second nature of commercial capitalism. The writings considered here are generally more optimistic in this respect, in their jubilantly modernist celebration of glimpses of the city as a place of active, transitive community, but the later work becomes more darkly meditative as Benjamin returns to the more sombre and thoroughly familiar world of his native city. The emphasis on flow and transitivity as real, authentic social intercourse rather than the cynically limited version encouraged by forces of capital accumulation is a theme that emerges in other writers to be considered here. In addition, the darkly baroque world of Benjamin's earlier writing, and perhaps much of his later work, can be compared with Iain Sinclair's London, where ways of escape from a labyrinthine condition of meaningless degradation

play a significant role. Sinclair does not, like Benjamin, directly refer to notions of redemption, but neither does Raymond Williams whose long history of place involves a steady, slow negotiation of elements, human and otherwise, which can both benefit and threaten the continuation and development of its human inhabitants. What Benjamin does seem to share with Williams and Henri Lefebvre, is a belief in the significance of a cultural politics of everyday life where the ordinary details of everyday practices and transactions are at least as significant as the exceptional achievements of exceptional individuals.

Like many of the writers discussed here, Benjamin resorts to the reflective walk as an inspirational source of observation. The only writers who do not obviously share this characteristic with him are the other, Marxist writers discussed in this chapter. It is worth considering how much this is due to a relatively totalising approach to the conceptualisation of social space, an issue we will return to in Michel de Certeau's distinction between the 'map' and the 'tour' in the next chapter. Benjamin himself notes in 'The Storyteller' that the story is being replaced by the more totalising and informational practice of the novel.<sup>9</sup>

It can be observed in this context that both Williams's *People of the Black Mountains* and Sinclair's *Downriver* display a form which comprises a suite of tales rather than the main-narrative-stem-with-subordinate-branches type of narrative structure that tends to characterise more conventional novels. It is this

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<sup>9</sup> See Benjamin (1992). The essay was originally written in 1935.

kind of structure that is challenged at every level by Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between arboreal and rhizomatic forms of thinking.

## 1.2. Lefebvre and the social production of space

*The Production of Space* (1991) is one of Lefebvre's later works in a long and prolific writing career. This was devoted, among other things, to an analysis of the nature of modernity, to an exploration of the functions and potential of the modern city and to the development of a liberating cultural politics of everyday life. His writings have been a major influence on the work of numerous British sociologists, geographers, and political and cultural theorists.<sup>10</sup> The opening part of *The Production of Space* is taken up with a hostile analysis of ways in which writers, such as Kristeva, Derrida and Barthes, associated with semiotics-based approaches to cultural issues fail to disentangle themselves from what Lefebvre sees as an essentially mentalistic notion of space:

This school, whose growing renown may have something to do with its growing dogmatism, is forever promoting the basic sophistry whereby the philosophico-epistemological notion of space is fetishized and the mental realm comes to envelop the social and physical ones. (Lefebvre 1991:15)

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<sup>10</sup> Harvey provides a brief sketch of Lefebvre's intellectual career in the afterword to Lefebvre (1991). Soja (1996) includes a lengthy appreciation in its first chapter. Among recent discussions are: Gregory (1995), Osborne (1996), Pile (1996) and a number of articles in Benko & Strohmayer (1997).

Of particular interest is the distinction Lefebvre makes between the mental, associated with thought, language, abstraction, sophistry, on the one hand, and the social and the physical on the other. He offers in place of this a 'unitary theory' (11) which will encounter what he terms the 'truth of space' in contrast to the 'true space' constructed by the representations of current thinking in philosophy and spatial science (9). Lefebvre's approach is totalising in the Hegelian and Marxist aspects of its attempt to produce a deeper level of explanatory adequacy in relation to notions of space and in the way in which it resorts to a broad, philosophical history of the space it characterises in order to do so. At the same time, Nietzschean notions of difference emerge increasingly as his history reaches the present.

Lefebvre's primary conceptual tool is the triadic distinction between 'spatial practice', 'representations of space', and 'representational space', (characterised as 'the perceived', 'the conceived' and 'the lived' in more general as opposed to specifically spatial terms) what Edward Soja refers to as his 'trialectics' of space.<sup>11</sup> This is used in relation to a categorization of historico-spatial epochs, moving from 'absolute space' through 'abstract' space and 'contradictory space' to 'differential space'.<sup>12</sup> Here Lefebvre attempts, in a classically Marxist fashion, not merely to describe the world but to change it by providing an analytical universal history of space which

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<sup>11</sup> See Lefebvre (1991:38-42) for an introduction to these terms and relations between them. Soja (1996) provides his own interpretation of their significance in his second chapter.

<sup>12</sup> These are the broadly defining historical terms but Michael Dear notes that all of the following kinds of space are referred to in Lefebvre's book: ' (...) absolute, abstract, appropriated, capitalist, concrete, contradictory, cultural, differentiated, dominated, dramatized, epistemological, familial, instrumental, leisure, lived, masculine, mental, natural, neutral, organic, physical, plural, political, pure, real, repressive, sensory, social, socialist, socialized, state, transparent, true, and women's space.' (Dear 1997: 49)

can also function as a programme to challenge the repressions imposed by what he terms a 'dominant space' through other, tactical 'appropriations' of that space.<sup>13</sup> Again, we can see similar tactics employed by the writers discussed in the next chapter.

Lefebvre's is not only an aggressively political type of analytical history, it is also a 'long' history, a characteristic it shares not only with that of approaches such as that, perhaps most famously, of Braudel, but also a great number of the writers discussed in this dissertation.<sup>14</sup> The earlier part of this history concerns itself with the way in which earlier forms of space are dominated and abstracted into something more exploitative. Here, for instance, Lefebvre discusses the origins of absolute space:

The cradle of absolute space - its origin, if we are to use that term - is a fragment of agro-pastoral space, a set of places named and exploited by peasants, or by nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists. A moment comes when, through the actions of masters or conquerors, a part of this space is assigned a new role, and henceforward appears as transcendent, as sacred... (234)

This passage is cited partly because it is relevant to some of the major preoccupations of Raymond Williams's *The People of the Black Mountains*.

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<sup>13</sup> See Lefebvre (1991: 164-168) for a fuller discussion which anticipates much of de Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari in their approaches to relations between dominant and subordinated cultures and the role played in those relations by movement and space.

<sup>14</sup> A 'long *history of space*' (Lefebvre 1991:116) to be precise.



One of the more interesting observations made in the later part of Lefebvre's book is the way in which modern social relations are characterised as producing an abstractly fragmented and exploitative, as opposed to more genuinely differential, form of social space. The body is 'pulverized' into sufficiently manipulable parts and then reconstituted in a deceptive mirror-like world of commercialised fragmentation, closely comparable to Benjamin's characterisation of a cynically exploitative second nature.<sup>15</sup> Like Deleuze and Guattari, in *Anti-Oedipus*, Lefebvre sees this as a socio-historically produced more than a natural, universal human condition.<sup>16</sup> He then turns to an analysis of the underlying contradictions embodied in such a space. Here again the primary concern is with challenging the 'true space' of intellectual theorising which currently, in Lefebvre's view, succeeds only in reinforcing the compartmentalising priorities of capital accumulation and which 'swallows' the 'representational space' that people occupy and reproduce in their day to day lives. The real challenge to this domination can only be provided by uncovering the 'truth of space' whose theoretical analysis can reconnect people's behaviour to their full bodily desire and to difference, as opposed to the limited differences or 'needs' afforded by that social space which currently dominates and encloses human behaviour. In his conclusion, Lefebvre suggests that this 'truth of space' involves acceptance of the replacement of the notion of 'totality' by that of 'centrality', where the latter concept refers to : 'A momentary centre.'(399):

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<sup>15</sup> See Lefebvre (1991:310-314)

<sup>16</sup> All three, while adapting elements of Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, object to his tendency to treat conditions such as the Oedipus complex as natural universals, rather than the

The notion of *centrality* replaces the notion of *totality*, repositioning it, relativizing it, and rendering it dialectical. Any centrality, once established, is destined to suffer dispersal, to dissolve or explode from the effects of saturation, attrition, outside aggressions, and so on. This means that the 'real' can never become completely fixed, that it is constantly in a state of mobilization. It also means that a general *figure* (that of the centre and 'decentring') is in play, which leaves room for both repetition and difference, for both time and juxtaposition.

(399)

Lefebvre's thinking here comes close to that of two perspectives discussed later, those of Deleuze and Guattari and Arran Gare. Lefebvre does not appear to demand a total explosion of difference but a more traditional dialectic between centripetal and centrifugal tendencies in social organization. Gare offers something similar in relation to theoretical elements of an ecologically sensitive regional politics, while Deleuze and Guattari push further in the direction of a politics of difference by apparently refusing any kind of centre in their espousal of rhizomatics.

In his final chapter Lefebvre again appeals to notions of the body, the senses and an analysis of rhythms as the way forward to a more effective spatial politics: 'The passive body (the senses) and the active body (labour) converge in space. The analysis of rhythms must serve the necessary and inevitable restoration of the total body.' (405) It has already been observed that an

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result of specific socio-historical conditions. See Pile (1995) and Gregory (1997) for discussions of Lefebvre's appropriations of Lacan.

approach like this is to be found in aspects of Benjamin's writings on cities. What Lefebvre seems to provide here is a more totalised abstract analysis of space as socially produced, in partial contrast to Benjamin's more strikingly impressionistic and concretised illustrations of the city in motion. Lefebvre offers a powerful series of speculations and analyses concerning the significance and historical development of space as a social concept, space as a place in which the origins of thought and behaviour are nurtured and which is always crucial to their formation. Space is presented not as something that can be dealt with separately in convenient forms of technical and academic compartmentalisation but as something which is fundamental, pervasive and not easy to get at in terms of an effective critical analysis.

### **1: 3 David Harvey: place, space and postmodernity**

David Harvey is a writer who clearly acknowledges the influence of Lefebvre on his work. In *Social Justice and the City* (Harvey 1973) he describes the development he made from a liberal, descriptive geographer to one who wanted to intervene decisively in processes of injustice. In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Harvey 1990), on which we shall focus here, he produces a work which is in many ways as broad in scope and decisively innovatory as Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. The book is divided into four main parts. The first provides a discussion of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism as forms of socio-cultural development, looking for elements not merely of difference but also of continuity in relation to each. Harvey expresses an attitude of scepticism towards more playfully anarchic forms of

postmodernist cultural theorising and activity, as the following extract indicates:

(...) postmodernism, with its emphasis upon the ephemerality of *jouissance*, its insistence upon the impenetrability of the other, its concentration on the text rather than the work, its penchant for deconstruction bordering on nihilism, its preference for aesthetics over ethics, takes matters too far. It takes them beyond the point where any coherent politics are left, while that wing of it that seeks a shameless accommodation with the market puts it firmly in the tracks of an entrepreneurial culture that is the hallmark of reactionary neoconservatism. Postmodernist philosophers tell us not only to accept but to revel in the fragmentations and the cacophony of voices through which the dilemmas of the modern world are understood. Obsessed with deconstructing and delegitimizing every form of argument they encounter, they can end only in condemning their own validity claims to the point where nothing remains for any basis of reasoned action. Postmodernism has us accepting the reifications and partitionings, actually celebrating the activity of masking and cover-up, all the fetishisms of locality, place, or social grouping, while denying that kind of meta-theory which can grasp the political-economic processes (money flows, international divisions of labour, financial markets and the like) that are becoming ever more universal in their depth, intensity, reach and power over daily life. (Harvey 1990: 116-117)

In this passage the attitude to postmodern culture and philosophising is reminiscent of that of Lefebvre towards earlier aspects of cultural theorising. The 'difference' perceived by postmodernists is seen as collaboration in a process of 'fragmentation' by Harvey. The criticism is not made in the name of any immediate appeal to the truth of a deeper structural analysis but in terms of a 'coherent politics' which still sufficiently adheres to reason. The later charges push postmodernism further into the characterisation of an obfuscating neoconservatism which has relieved itself of any real responsibility with regard to the critical analysis of existing socio-cultural conditions. A paragraph later, 'the rhetoric of postmodernism', specifically that of Lyotard, author of *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) comes under attack. In some ways, this would seem a little ironic in that the passage of invective quoted would seem to be rhetoric with a vengeance.

Just how effective Harvey's rhetoric might be is difficult to gauge, but the narrative of his book moves, in its second and third parts, to consideration of economic and then spatial factors in the rise of postmodernism. The second part provides an account of the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy which organizes its production through a regime of 'flexible accumulation', a process which is more highly sensitive to minor qualitative differences in location and therefore to the significance of place, if for manipulative and cynical reasons of commercial profit.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Harvey (1990: 141-172) for a discussion of flexible accumulation and related characterizations of dominant patterns of socio-economic organization in the later twentieth century.

The third part focuses on spatial issues, adapting aspects of the work of Bourdieu as well as Lefebvre in order to characterise the spatial aspects of the transition from modernity to postmodernity. What emerges from this is Harvey's celebrated notion of 'time-space compression' but also, perhaps, particularly given the extent of the economic analysis, the impression that the base and superstructure model of Marxist socio-cultural analysis is far from defunct, if in need of a spatial component.<sup>18</sup> The fear expressed in Harvey's seventeenth chapter, on time-space compression and the postmodern condition, is of an increasing tendency towards a reactionary and essentialistic notion of place prompted by bewilderment and insecurity at the speed of late twentieth century socio-economic and technological developments.

Harvey's aim in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, as both geographer and cultural analyst is to: ' (...) pull the condition of postmodernity into the range of a condition accessible to historical materialist analysis and interpretation.' (307). This involves regarding it as one of a series of waves of 'time-space compression', if one of exceptional intensity and magnitude. It also involves, in the fourth and final part of the book, the announcement of a crisis in historical materialism. Here Harvey criticises the New Left for abandoning some of what he considers to be crucial elements of historical materialism, particularly the role of the proletariat and, in focusing on the characterisation and significance of cultural epochs such as modernism and postmodernism, sacrificing the ability to analyse and interpret 'deeper

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<sup>18</sup> See Harvey (1991: 241-307) for an interpretation of the development of modernity and postmodernity in terms of time-space compression.

transformations in the culture of capitalism' (306). At the same time, he recommends more openness to categories of difference, to the significance of the media and the image-based nature of much cultural production, as well as to issues of space, and a generally more open-ended approach rather than the more totalising earlier perspectives.

Again, there would seem to be a difficulty here. Harvey's own book is replete with charts and accompanying commentaries on the distinction between modernity and postmodernity, modernism and postmodernism.

To be fair, his intention is to challenge the notion of a complete break and to replace it with one of continuity between two different but successive phases of the adjustment of a socio-economic regime to its accumulative requirements. Harvey insists on retaining a Marxist hermeneutic that can read off the significance of socio-cultural developments from a primarily economic base. In this he is perhaps more direct in his approach than Jameson, but provides, at least in principle, a relatively clear form of the 'cognitive mapping' that Jameson calls for. His approach is both direct and aggressive and openly treats factors pertaining to the organization of production as fundamental, as in the second part of the book. In this respect, he would seem to follow the approach of Lefebvre but also to provide an even more directly contentious and less abstract analysis of current developments in his attack on what he sees as the irresponsible excesses of postmodernist thinking. Whether his final section provides a way through the dilemmas he poses, beyond acknowledging a difficult situation and opting for a deep,

clarifying, rational analysis in opposition to the surface 'voodoo' of postmodernist culture and Reaganomics, is, however, questionable.

In a slightly later paper, *From space to place and back again* (Harvey 1993) Harvey continues where he left off in suggesting modifications to current approaches in historical materialism and debates the problematic nature of place as a form of difference. He notes the almost endless range of meanings attributable to place but then suggests that 'some underlying unity' (4) may be accessible among this confusing richness of possible significance and then proposes to focus on a 'territorial' sense of place in relation to other possible connotations. His initial emphasis is on the social production and organization of space through processes of capital accumulation and on the perception of place in relation to this process. Harvey observes that:

The geographical landscape that results is not evenly developed but strongly differentiated. 'Difference' and 'otherness' is *produced* in space through the simple logic of uneven capital investment and a proliferating geographical division of labour. (Harvey 1993: 6)

He then moves to another list of four factors in this production. These boil down to: 1) greater feelings of insecurity of place since around 1970 with the decline in power of large urban-industrial centres; 2) the greater geographical mobility of capital due to diminished transport costs; 3) a much greater active desire on the part of local inhabitants to differentiate their place from others in view of the increased sensitivity to qualitative aspects of places as sites of investment; 4) the



rise of speculative place construction as a means of absorbing excess capital. Having made this primarily economic point, which refuses place any great significance other than as a marker of trends in capital investment, Harvey then concedes that the significance people attach to the places they live in is not simply a matter of economic survival. In this context he returns to Heidegger's thinking on place in relation to industrial and technological development and back to the point of a feeling of 'homelessness' (Harvey 1993:11) which is close to that of the placelessness described by Relph. Relph is in fact briefly referred to here in the context of a sceptical summary of notions of authenticity and dwelling but this scepticism is balanced by sympathetic references to writers of a more Marxist orientation, such as Juergen Habermas and Raymond Williams, who also pay attention to the significance of place. This leads Harvey to explore the significance of place in terms of a comparison of Marxist and Heideggerean approaches. The international and communicative elements of Marxism are stressed but its potential insensitivity to local differences noted (13). The dangerously 'exclusionary and parochialist' (14) aspects of Heidegger's thinking are again focused on but what the approaches of both Heidegger and Marx are claimed to have in common is the characteristic of ' (...) seeing authentic communities as materially and physically rooted in particular places through dwelling, rather than as being constructed solely, as so frequently happens in postmodern rhetoric, in the realms of discourse.' (14). Whether or not this claim is valid, the attack on postmodernism as a form of discourse-based perspective which takes little account of sensuous, physical reality in contrast to the modernist thinking of both Marx and Heidegger, is again indicative of an even stronger tendency in Harvey than in Lefebvre to establish a divide between the base of

material realities and the superstructure of verbal ones. This in itself can be seen as part of an emphasis on ways of resisting rather than merely reproducing the excesses of late twentieth century capital's 'desperate speculative gamble' (27) to produce a space sufficiently conducive to the requirements of sufficiently high levels of accumulation. Consequently, a modified form of Heidegger's thinking, one combined with a greater degree of emphasis on traditional Marxist approaches to capital accumulation, is included in Harvey's thinking as an element of the 'treatment of difference' (5) that we have been told at the beginning of the essay must become a fundamental aspect of Marxist thinking.

Harvey seems to opt for a Marxism with a degree of 'difference' and Heideggerean appeals to the significance of place, though in a slightly more uneasy fashion than Lefebvre. As with Lefebvre, Harvey seems to strive for a modified dialectical approach to questions of space and place, but also to seek for a more directly practical and empirical approach to actual instances which illustrate the nature of broader processes. This involves him in a rather more embattled discussion of the problems of dealing with the exploitative features of the space of accumulative capital, particularly that of the last fifteen years dividing the publication of his book from that of Lefebvre.

In both Lefebvre's and Harvey's approaches there is a degree of uncertainty regarding the possibility of integrating a respect for multiplicity and difference with a sufficiently incisive analysis of the manipulations of an organised social space. Lefebvre produces an impressive account of the nature of a society's space and the problems of coming to grips with the extent of its hold over our

thought and behaviour. At the same time, he still insists on a considerably *dualistic distinction between centre and periphery in the form of relations between momentary centres and the edges they bring into contact.* Harvey focuses on the more immediate implications of Lefebvre's comparably theoretical programme by essentially applying it to the developments of the last twenty five years. Harvey's problem is to find a way of maintaining a progressive version of the social without surrendering the particularities of difference. His criticism of postmodern culture emphasises its tendency to over-essentialise place and other forms of difference, thereby producing a pseudo-mystical notion of difference which merely collaborates with forms of manipulative social fragmentation, presenting them as a mysterious form of 'being' rather than a constantly developing form of 'becoming' open to contestation from a variety of perspectives. At the same time, Harvey is not completely critical of writers associated with post-structuralism and postmodernism and the next chapter examines aspects of the work of de Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari to see if there may not be some common ground in their approaches to difference, place and the social production and organisation of space

## **Chapter Two: Space, Place and Difference**

The writers considered in this chapter tend to be associated with developments in French post-structuralism and the politics of difference, though also with environmentalist thinking. A brief discussion of aspects of de Certeau's writing is intended to serve as an introduction to a longer discussion of elements of Deleuze and Guattari's. In those aspects of their writing considered, all of these writers produce a distinctly playful, rhetorical approach to the areas they consider. Their treatment of questions of place and space is predominantly couched in terms of tactics of evasion and subversion, rather than direct opposition, to a dominant cultural order seen as distantly surveying and controlling the space in which we move. In these respects, they present a substantially different approach to questions of space and place from Harvey and Lefebvre, though there are points of contact, particularly with Lefebvre, as well as with aspects of the work of Benjamin.

### **2.1. Michel de Certeau: Spatial Practices**

The characteristics referred to above are perhaps more immediately evident in de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Like Benjamin, he offers a politics which is somewhat melancholy in its initial assumptions of an oppressed majority that is in no position to offer direct opposition to its oppressors, but the tactical, 'flee but while fleeing...' element of his approach indicates a politics of creative resistance rather

than the surface theatricalism that Harvey sees as characteristic of postmodernism. Like both Lefebvre and Deleuze and Guattari, de Certeau shows that his observations apply to the academy as much as other institutions of power and control. He begins by explaining that he is interested in the 'antidiscipline' of operations performed against 'the violence of order (...) transmuted into a disciplinary technology' (xiv) by a dominant minority culture which has successfully marginalised the majority. The initial observation regarding discipline refers the reader to Lefebvre's work on the politics of everyday life as a 'fundamental source' in this respect.<sup>1</sup>

De Certeau's general approach in the book is well-known; the 'polemological' analysis of culture whereby he observes the 'tactics' of multifarious, subordinated groups operating on a territory which they cannot regard as their own since it is organised by the 'strategies' of a more powerful dominant culture.<sup>2</sup> This approach has been adapted subsequently by writers such as John Fiske in more specific analyses of American, Australian and British culture and his approach has been subjected to the charge of revisionism by at least one eminent figure in British Cultural Studies.<sup>3</sup>

De Certeau's use of an opposition between space and place is mainly employed in the central section of his book, 'Spatial Practices'. Place is mentioned in the introduction, where the reader is told that: 'The place of a

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<sup>1</sup> See de Certeau (1984: xv, 205)

<sup>2</sup> See de Certeau (1984: xvii-xx)

tactic belongs to the other.’ (xix). Operating in places in which one is situated but which are controlled by others is one of the principal concerns of the book. These operations are presented as part of ancient as much as modern history, and as part of nature: ‘The Greeks called these ‘ways of operating, *metis*. But they go much further back, to the immemorial intelligence displayed in the tricks of and imitations of plants and fishes’.

(xix). Paul Carter, discussed in the next chapter, also makes use of the related notion of *kairos* in connection with aspects of Aboriginal Australian culture, and Deleuze and Guattari’s appeal to the local operations of the nomad and rhizomatic forms of behaviour, such as those of ants, bear a distinct resemblance to this appeal to a tactics based on a close relationship to one’s territory.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, David Harvey was observed earlier expressing antipathy to rhetoric, tricks and maskings in his determination to get at the deep structure of accumulative capital’s domination of space. De Certeau appears to offer a cannily rhetorical evocation of a a complex, shifting ‘space’, swarming with evasive and disruptive heterogeneity, in the projected but never fully realised ‘place’ of the dominant social order. This bears a strong resemblance to the distinction Deleuze and Guattari make between a sedentary, homogeneous, ‘striated’ space and a moving, heterogeneous ‘smooth’ space, in *A Thousand Plateaus*. A certain notion of play, in the sense of diversion, or the unsettling of forms of seriousness and expertise is characteristic of both approaches. ‘Spatial Practices’ is preceded by discussions about the interest of thinkers such as Freud or Wittgenstein in

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<sup>3</sup> Jim McGuigan in *Cultural Populism* (1992)

<sup>4</sup> See Carter (1997: 344); Deleuze and Guattari (1988 : 9)

the significance of the ordinary or the everyday in language and other forms of cultural practice. Here, too, the distinction between speech and practice comes close to being erased, not only in terms of references to Austin and speech act theory but in the way movements and ruses are characterised in terms of rhetorical figures.<sup>5</sup>

The significance not merely of movement but of walking is emphasized in the opening chapter of the 'Spatial Practices' section, set, initially in the city, or more precisely, the top of the World Trade Center building in Manhattan, making a connection between the notion of a dominant culture, capitalism, and the United States. Like Lefebvre, de Certeau is keen to oppose the notions of a theoretical space with that of a practised space. He particularly focuses on the 'long poem of walking' (103) whose irregularities and limited access to visibility creatively evade the organizations of a distantly surveying mode of domination. The subversive nature of the figure of the walker is, of course, one with a long pedigree in French literature, and initially in relation to poetry rather than cultural theory, from the time of Baudelaire onwards, though one needs to note the transition from the notion of exceptional individuals, in the mode of the *flaneur*, to that of the actions of ordinary people evoked by de Certeau. Urban walking and their relation to aspects of Surrealism and Situationism are also of central significance to the writing of Ian Sinclair.

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<sup>5</sup> See de Certeau (1984: 19-20)

The short second chapter of the section provides a contrasting digression on the comfortably enclosed nature of railway travel. A comparison is made with Robinson Crusoe and other self-enclosed forms of traveller who fail to make any real communicative contact with the landscapes they enclose or penetrate. This is a theme which provides the central figure for Paul Carter's comparison between European, colonial and local, native approaches to place in Australia. It is also reminiscent of de Certeau's own preoccupations as a cultural historian with ways in which history misrepresents, by capture or exclusion, the people it dominates or removes.<sup>6</sup> Tactful, tactile sensitivity to others is contrasted with the distant, incommunicative and insensitive gaze of the colonizer of space.

Relations between place and space are more directly considered in the final chapter of the section which begins with a tendentiously playful allusion to the *metaphorai* which constitute vehicles of transportation for commuters in modern Athens. De Certeau moves from this observation to one concerning the role narratives bear as cultural forms of transportation and organisers of the spaces we traverse through them. His particular distinction between place and space is then presented. Place is seen as the 'proper' of an order, with everything in its place and a place for everything. Space, on the other hand, is indicative of movement in relation to place and is compared to the actual speaking of the word : '(...) In short, *space is a practiced place.*(117) Stories are then seen as performing 'a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places.'

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<sup>6</sup> See particularly *The Writing of History* (de Certeau 1988) in this respect.



(118) as well as the changing nature of relations between them. As with Deleuze's distinction between the virtual and the actual, much depends on the creativity of the selection from a variety of options.<sup>7</sup> Particular attention is paid in this context to Linde and Labov's observation regarding differences between 'map' and 'tour' types of descriptions regarding the layout of apartments.<sup>8</sup> De Certeau sees the latter as involving 'operations' of the sort he is interested in as tactical evasions of the strategies displayed by dominant cultural orders. There is a distinction between 'seeing' and 'going' (119) in the two types of narrative. Movement and action are again prioritised over sedentary observation as ways of occupying space. Like Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, de Certeau then provides his own account of the history of maps.<sup>9</sup> His emphasis is on the way in which modern maps obliterate the traces of the actual movements of individuals and their 'tours', which made them possible. As in other aspects of his work, de Certeau is interested here in the way that the producers of histories and other forms of discourse do not merely describe but perform their own operations upon those who are their objects. His approach to the significance of place and space has marked similarities to that of Deleuze and Guattari in the kinds of figures and oppositions it employs, while perhaps drawing more attention to the rhetorical basis of its claims.

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<sup>7</sup> The distinction is developed in *Bergsonism* (Deleuze 1991a) and *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 1994). See Ansell Pearson (1997) and Badiou (200) for discussions of its significance.

<sup>8</sup> See de Certeau (1984:118-119)

## 2.2. Deleuze and Guattari : A Thousand Plateaus

The writing of Deleuze and Guattari, collaboratively and individually, covers a wide range of concerns. Place, space and the earth are among these and play a significant role in their most ambitious and wide-ranging book, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980).<sup>10</sup> It was conceived as the second part of a two-part study, 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia' of which *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) is the first part. *A Thousand Plateaus* explores a wide range of issues, though like de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* it often presents itself as a manual of tactics as much as a discussion and analysis of phenomena and concepts. Like Lefebvre and de Certeau, Deleuze and Guattari indicate an interest in developing a micropolitics of liberation which functions at the level of day to day behaviour and events but make a broader range of connections - from the molecular, through the body and the social, to the cosmos. They present a theory of nature and an ontology as much as a political and ethical manifesto. Issues pertaining to space and territory emerge more clearly in the later stages of the book, but its whole structure and approach also has a bearing on how they are treated, as do aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's earlier thinking. Some consideration of these earlier elements may serve as a useful introduction to their treatment of space, place and closely related concepts.

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<sup>9</sup> See Harvey (1990: 240-259) for a longer account which makes considerable use of de Certeau's.

<sup>10</sup> This was the date of publication of the original French version. Subsequent references are to the translation into English by Brian Massumi (Deleuze and Guattari 1986)

Gilles Deleuze is well known as one of the leading figures in the development of post-structuralism and the thinking of difference. His work prior to his collaborations with Guattari, includes studies of Hume (1952), Nietzsche (1962), Bergson (1966) and Spinoza (1968).<sup>11</sup> In the study of Hume, one of his earliest works, he considers how the social, while admirable in principle, in that it extends the sympathies of individuals beyond that of family and immediate friends, can also damagingly repress positive, active and creative forms of behaviour. This preoccupation is developed in different ways in relation to Bergson, Nietzsche and Spinoza.<sup>12</sup> In the study of Bergson, a physics of process, as movement or change, is developed. An ontology based on processes of becoming and differentiation emerges in this and related books, such as *Difference and Repetition* (1968). In the books on Nietzsche and Spinoza this physics takes on an increasingly ethical and political dimension. Nietzsche's scepticism about the limitations of the social, as represented by conventional moralities, is connected to Spinoza's earlier attempt to provide a less mystical account of relations between body and soul, as in the following passage:

When Spinoza says that we do not yet know what a body can do, this is practically a war cry. He adds that we speak of consciousness, mind and soul, of the power of the soul over the body; we chatter away about these things but do not even know what a body can do.

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<sup>11</sup> References here are to the original dates of publication; see bibliography for details of translations into English.

<sup>12</sup> Hardt (1993) provides a lucid interpretation of Deleuze's approach to Bergson, Nietzsche and Spinoza.

Moral chattering replaces true philosophy. (1990:253)

In *Difference and Repetition* this approach increasingly takes the form of a championing of processes of difference against what is seen as repressive forms of organization which limit the possibilities of bodies inside the restrictions of specific forms of representation.

Felix Guattari, a practising psychoanalyst and political activist who adapted many of the ideas of Lacan into a more positive and less melancholy reading of the potential of the human psyche is a figure comparable to and also influenced by figures of 'anti-psychiatry' such as Wilhelm Reich. Like Reich and other figures associated with the Frankfurt School, Guattari was interested in relating psychological to social, political and ecological conditions. He collaborated as a writer not only with Deleuze but with radical Marxists like Antonio Negri.<sup>13</sup> His first major publication, *Anti-Oedipus* was also his first collaboration with Deleuze. *Anti-Oedipus* introduces arguments used in *A Thousand Plateaus* therefore a brief summary of its approach may be helpful. The primary argument is that psychoanalysis, while a potentially creative and liberating process, has become an institution of repression. The Oedipus complex is seen not as a natural, universal condition but a result of specific elements of social organization. Freud and Marx are brought together in a creative combination which also exposes the limitations of both of their

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<sup>13</sup> See Guattari (1996:273-276) for a select bibliography of his publications.

approaches and sketches a history of society that progresses from the Savage through the Despotic to the Capitalist, the condition of the present era, with the possibility of a fourth era, characterised as 'the new earth'. The historical analysis is supplemented by an adapted form of Kantian syntheses characterising aspects of human consciousness.<sup>14</sup> The whole is presented in a deliberately provocative style, which Eugene Holland characterises as that of the tendentious joke. In place of psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari propose a 'schizoanalysis' that will enable more fully productive forms of socialization among humans as well as between them and other forms of being. Holland sees this as a version of Marx's notion of a universal history with a much greater emphasis on the positive nature of difference:

Schizoanalytic universal history...involves difference rather than identity, singularity and escape rather than unity and reconciliation (...)  
the subject of this history is not a class destined to put an end to all classes (...) but the molecular unconscious of the human animal as life-form. (Holland 1999: 95)

It is these micro-processes of molecularity that are further elaborated and explored in *A Thousand Plateaus*, a title suggestive of both natural geography and multiplicity. It covers a variety of themes, including individual and group psychology, geological and biological evolution,

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<sup>14</sup> Connective synthesis of production, disjunctive synthesis of recording, conjunctive synthesis of consumption-consummation. See Holland (1999) for an introduction to the basic concepts and concerns of *Anti-Oedipus*.

language and semiotics, the organization and social coding of the body, narrative and literary fiction, political processes, forms of 'becoming', music and the refrain, the state and related forms of political organization and forces which work in relation to but partially and creatively evade them, and modes of organisation characterised as the 'smooth' and the 'striated'. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize their interest in presenting a physics and a cartography:

All we talk about are multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types, bodies without organs and their construction and selection, the planes of consistency and, in each case the units of measure. (...) writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come. (4-5)

Like Lefebvre, Deleuze and Guattari are interested in the truth of the space but differ in approach, focusing on writing and on a physics of productive chaos as their starting point. They do not, like Lefebvre, directly emphasise the socially produced nature of space. Instead, they present a conceptualisation of the world as processes of movement, flow and change and insist on an active, interventionist physics of multiplicity, in relation to human tendencies to classify and organise at too simple a level. The figure they adopt to make this point is 'the rhizome' of the introductory plateau's title:

1 and 2. Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. (7)

This is a variation on Deleuze's attack on representation, from the perspective of difference, in *Difference and Repetition*, and on the relation between the three syntheses presented in *Anti-Oedipus*. Throughout the book, the relationships between tendencies to static, ordered, premature unification, on the one hand, and tendencies to anarchic, differentiating, multiplicities, on the other, are mapped in relation to one another. Another difference between this approach and Lefebvre's is that a sense of historical progression is actively escaped from by appeals to a chaotomic nature, a virtuality in relation to which historical developments are presented as actualities. Thus the 'plateaus' of the book, which the reader is encouraged to read in any order, are dated but do not appear in chronological order: 'The ideal for a book would be to lay out everything on (...) a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations.' (9).

Like de Certeau, Deleuze and Guattari work very much in the realm of rhetoric. They do not deny the power of language (a whole plateau is devoted to the subject) but they seek to provide an alternative mapping by suggestion, the rhetorical evocation of multiplicitous alternatives to repressively unifying forms of representation.<sup>15</sup> Whereas Lefebvre looks to the possibility of a genuinely differentiated social space by plotting the lines of its development to date, Deleuze and Guattari, like de Certeau, but in a more aggressive and wide-ranging fashion, conjure up a tactics of differentiation in relation to a ground which is that of nature as chaosmos. Their approach is more playful than that of Lefebvre, but like Lefebvre's it is wary of verbal representations of the truth, of space or anything else. Its playfully anarchic style of presentation can therefore be seen as consistent with a commitment to unsettle any tendency towards an over-rigid organisation of multiplicities. The problem is whether de Certeau or Deleuze and Guattari can be defended from Harvey's charge of an ultimately collaborative stance which mistakes the fragmentations of capitalism identified by Lefebvre for more substantial forms of difference. To consider this, and Deleuze and Guattari's approach to space, place and related concepts in more specific terms, it will be helpful to move to the closing plateaus of the book.

The first directly relevant plateau in is the eleventh, '1837: Of the Refrain'. The main concern of the plateau is the role played by sound and music in establishing a territory, an 'interior space' (311), as protection

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<sup>15</sup> See the fourth plateau (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 75-110) for the discussion of language.



from the 'forces of chaos'. This can take many forms, not all of them simply musical, and one comparison is with the *nomos*, 'a distribution in space' (312). The crucial components here are seen as being '*Milieus and Rhythms...the concern of ancient cosmogonies*'. (313) Milieus are characterised as vibratory aspects of 'directional components' in chaos. They are 'open to chaos', in contrast to rhythms which are their 'answer' to chaos' and the basis of the refrain. Again, the presentation is essentially that of a physics, a complex of interrelated forces moving at different speeds, with different consistencies and relations to one another. A 'territory' is then characterised as an act which is performed upon milieus, making them distinctive. This is seen as a function of creative expression rather than aggression: '*...expressive qualities or matters of expression enter shifting relations with one another that 'express' the relation of the territory they draw to the interior milieu of impulses and exterior milieu of circumstances.*' (317 –italics in original). The theatrical performance of the 'brown stagemaker (*Scenopoetes dentirostris*)' (315) is enlisted as evidence of the beginnings of art: 'The artist: the first person to set out a boundary stone, or to make a mark.'(316). The rest of the plateau then traces the complexities of relations that can be seen as developing from this basic perception, culminating in a brief sketch of the characteristic features of 'classical', 'romantic' and 'modern' art. Again, it is emphasized that these 'three 'ages', the classical, the romantic and the modern' should not be seen as part of an evolutionary process, but as 'assemblages enveloping different Machines, or different relations to the Machine' (346); different creative actualisations of virtualities, in Deleuzian terms. The plateau ends with a call for

deterritorialization of the refrain, ('Produce a deterritorialized refrain as the final end of music, release it to the Cosmos' (350)) for lines and movements, not systems. This would seem to be the refrain of *A Thousand Plateaus* generally, the attempt to constantly become as open to the chaosmos as possible without disappearing into chaos, though it is accepted that the tendency to protect oneself from the cosmos, to establish order(s) will be just as significant if not predominant. The approach in this plateau bears an interesting resemblance to Lefebvre's notion of a 'rhythm analysis', which he suggested might be a particularly effective means of analysing the characteristics of different socio-spatial orders.<sup>16</sup> It also suggests connections between Deleuze and Guattari's general approach and most of those considered in the next chapter, which emphasize the relation of humans to place and the earth. Deleuze and Guattari's approach differs from these and other perspectives discussed here through its insistence on characterising relations to space and place mainly in terms of abstract physical processes that are constantly available as virtualities that can be actualised in various forms.

As with the distinction between root and rhizome in the first chapter, the twelfth plateau, '1227; Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine', operates with one between the State and the war-machine. These are initially contrasted in terms of the different movements of pieces in the games of chess and Go, respectively:

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<sup>16</sup> See Lefebvre (1991: 205-207)

(...) Go is war without battle lines (...) without battles even (...) pure strategy, whereas chess is a semiology. (...) in chess it is a question of arranging a closed space for oneself (...) of occupying the maximum number of squares with the minimum number of pieces. In Go, it is a question of arraying oneself in an open space, of holding space, of maintaining the possibility of springin up at any point (... ) The ‘smooth’ space of Go, as against the ‘striated’ space of chess. (353)

The contrast is comparable to de Certeau’s between ‘space’ and ‘place’, but presented in the terms of a more dramatically aggressive rhetoric – ‘deterritorialize the enemy by shattering his territory from within’ (353). The situation depicted is also the same. There is no ultimate victory for State or war machine:

It is in terms not of independence, but of coexistence and competition *in a perpetual field of interaction*, that we must conceive of exteriority and interiority, war machines of metamorphosis and State apparatuses of identity (...) (360-361)

The notion of an interactive tension between State and war machine is developed in relation to scientific, technical, philosophical and other forms of thinking, including ‘...a properly nomad thought that sweeps up English literature and constitutes American literature.’ (379).

The discussion further elaborates the concept of the nomad, again in relation to movement in space; the 'smooth' space occupied by the nomad is characterised in the following terms:

It is a tactile space, or rather 'haptic', a sonorous much more than a visual space. The variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature of smooth spaces of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography. The nomad, nomad space is localized and not delimited. What is both limited and limiting is striated space, the *relative global* (...) (382).

The nomad is not associated with the occupation of a particular place but with an absolute of the local, 'an infinite succession of local operations' (383) that challenges the 'relative global'. It is this characterisation of nomad space which leads Edward Casey to consider it as part of a tendency in twentieth century philosophical thinking to reinstate place.<sup>17</sup> As with de Certeau, the space is characterised in terms of the tactile and local operations as opposed to an area which can be visually surveyed from a distance.

The twelfth plateau and concepts such as the war-machine and the nomad are well-known. This is perhaps less the case with the succeeding, complementary plateau, '7000 B.C.: Apparatus of Capture'.

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<sup>17</sup> See Casey (1997:301-308)

This is a thesis close to that of Lefebvre, though the emphasis is on the impossibility of total capture rather than on contradiction. In both cases a politics of differentiation emerges.

Deleuze and Guattari move to a further discussion of elements of space in the next plateau, '1440: The Smooth and the Striated'. Here again variations on the theme of relations between rhizome and root, nomad and sedentary, war-machine and state, are presented - this time in the form of models. These include the musical, maritime and mathematical models, but also, in the final stages of the plateau, an aesthetic model, also defined as 'nomad art'. Here, again, a distinction between close-range and long-range perceptions is established, one which is applied to producers and consumers of artistic practices:

A painting is done at close range, even if it is seen from a distance.

Similarly, it is said that composers do not hear: they have close-range hearing, whereas listeners hear from a distance. Even writers write with the short-term memory whereas readers are assumed to have long-term memory. (493)

Artists and nomads are brought into close interconnection in terms of their being characterised as producing local, short-term operations. 'A line of variable direction that describes no contour and delimits no form...' (499) is seen as that which is capable of producing a smooth space. This perspective

can be compared with Paul Carter's distinction between *mimesis* and *methexis* in the next chapter, where the 'reverent miming' of *methexis* is preferred to the distanced representationalism of *mimesis*. Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis is on the forms of inter-relationship between 'smooth' and 'striated'. They close with a warning against any simple preference for the smooth.<sup>18</sup> Their approach in these respects is very close to that of de Certeau, in terms of a polemological analysis of the social that promotes means of evasion and subversion in relation to dominant social orders which are themselves characterised as distanced and pan-optically manipulative. Deleuze and Guattari's perspective extends into a full-blown physics of movement in space which provides every form of action and perception with a creative or disruptive potential. Whether this is simply a matter of rhetoric or an effective form of intervention must partly depend on one's view of the relation of language to action, which Deleuze and Guattari consider at some length. Like Lefebvre, they are sceptical of the claims of verbal discourse, but, unlike Lefebvre, they stress the importance of movements and forces without considering them primarily as elements in processes of socio-historical production. Socio-historically produced movements and spaces are viewed as actualisations of a broader virtuality that extends from the molecular to the cosmic in a generalised theoretical physics. The problem with this physics is its presentation in a highly speculative mode of verbal discourse with only minimal recourse to detailed forms of evidence. We are, in Deleuze and Guattari's own terms, presented with a 'refrain' which has much in common with the perspectives of both

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<sup>18</sup> 'Never presume that a smooth space will suffice to save us.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:500)

Here, Deleuze and Guattari again argue against notions of slow evolutionary progress from one stage to another but in terms of tendencies, or intensities, which reach critical 'thresholds of consistency' (432). The consistencies which produce the State and the city are seen as different but complementary:

It is futile to ask which came first, the city or the State, the urban or state revolution, because both are in reciprocal presupposition. Both the melodic lines of the towns and the harmonic cross sections of the States are necessary to effect the striation of space. (434)

These are contrasted, as in *Anti-Oedipus* with 'Primitive societies' that do not achieve sufficient degrees of consistency to produce a 'striation of space' and Deleuze and Guattari return to notions of tribalism in the alternatives they suggest to both the State and capitalism. Capital is seen as more powerful than the absolutist State since it is able to achieve: '*A new threshold of deterritorialization. (...) The law ceases to be the overcoding of customs, as it was in the archaic empire (...) it increasingly assumes the direct form and immediate characteristics of an axiomatic.*' (453). A discussion of the nature and implications of the axiomatics of capital follows, including its conjugation with others, such as those of the State, and its relation to flows it cannot master, innumerable, molecular minorities which can never be entirely integrated or eliminated. These form 'connections' that delineate a new Land' (472).

de Certeau and Lefebvre, but which makes a wider range of connections and places particular stress on movement, change and difference in partial but not total opposition to fixed, ordered spaces.



### **Chapter Three : Place, Poetics and the Earth**

This chapter considers writers who put a primary emphasis on the significance of place as opposed to space, including, in most cases, the earth. Aspects of the writing of the philosopher, Martin Heidegger and the poet, Charles Olson, whose work appeared earlier in the century but whose perspectives on the politics and poetics of place are of basic importance to the chapter, are considered first. Both are concerned with developing or re-discovering a georgics, an attitude of care in relation to the earth and its specificities on the part of humanity. As with trends in ecological thinking, on which the influence of Heidegger is considerable, their approach runs the risk of developing reactionary or nostalgic forms of social thinking. The reason for including Olson at this stage is that the project undertaken in his poetry and related essays can be seen as being as much an exercise in cultural theory as that of Heidegger or other writers discussed. This also applies to the work of Williams and Sinclair, but Olson's work has a strong affinity with that of Heidegger and is an integral aspect of the perspective on place presented in this section.

The other writers considered, both based in Australia, are the cultural philosopher, Arran Gare, and a cultural historian with a strong interest in the poetics of place, Paul Carter. Both present a politics and poetics which attach great value to the significance and specificity of place and places but which do not veer excessively towards exilic, parochial or essentialistic modes of thinking and are capable of offering a perspective

which can function productively at an international level of social relations, not merely at the local level.

### 3.1. Heidegger: Being in Place

Despite the fact that Benjamin and Heidegger were from the same nation, they came from and were primarily interested in very different kinds of place. Benjamin was a Jewish cosmopolitan intellectual from Berlin, fascinated by the developments of urban modernity and a Marxist, if somewhat mystical, revolutionary in his approach to such developments. Heidegger, on the other hand, began as a Christian neo-conservative, became a supporter of Nazism, and was rooted in the Swabian countryside of his birth, devoting himself to consideration of what an examination of the distant past could contribute to a more authentically lived future. If Benjamin has emerged as a newly fashionable figure in the age of postmodernity, Heidegger has, in some respects, won renewed fame as the philosophical patron saint of ecological thinking, and questions of ecology, the countryside and the earth, will be paramount in this chapter, in contrast to the primarily urban concerns of the first.

The first concept that comes to mind in relation to Heidegger's thinking is Being, more usually in the form of *Dasein*, where the prefix of 'da' or 'there' already suggests an element of placing. Closely related to this are concepts such as 'care' (*Sorge*) and 'nearness' (*Nahe*), suggestive of the custody of being that Heidegger sees as particular to humanity in its peculiarly linguistic relation to the planet. Humanity, like all forms of life, creates its own world or

worlds but in a relation of complexly productive 'strife' with the earth which will not easily or simply surrender the essential nature of its being.

Many of Heidegger's later essays and lectures have the feel of a sermon as much as a philosophical meditation and the proximity of the notion of a 'fall' from a state of grace which is characterised as attentiveness to the nature and responsibility of being is usually at their heart. An authentic state of being involves a closeness and attentiveness to the specific essence of the individuality of every part of the natural world, something lost, as Heidegger sees it, in the abstracted 'chatter' of much modern discourse and in a related technology which plunders the potential of the world and in doing so loses its path to an authentically meaningful human existence. Unlike Benjamin, Heidegger does not linger on the detailed observation of surface details but seeks to get beyond the surface 'appearance' of being in order to disclose its 'truth'. The problem with this approach is that he tends to do so by means of a persuasive, mystical rhetoric, gleaning the discourse of the ancient Greeks for words whose original meaning has apparently been lost and coining endless new forms of German to make points about the nature of Being. As with the writers in the previous chapter, word-play is a significant element, even if the tone is not obviously playful. A representative example might be part of a paragraph relating to the famous meditation on the significance of Van Gogh's painting of the peasant's clogs in *The Origin of the Work of Art* :

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. Under the soles stretches the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the Earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to resting-within-itself.

(Heidegger 1978: 159-160)

There is much that might reasonably be regarded as typical of Heidegger in this passage, though this is not to suggest that his prose always provides quite such concrete and poetical evocations of the rural world of the peasant. His evocation here is not simply idyllic pastoral - or not obviously so - riddled as it is with streaks of Kierkegaardian angst. The peasant woman worries and suffers. The picture presented tends towards a depiction of something close to timeless, though again there is no explicit claim in this direction. Its quality is as much poetical as philosophical in

the evocatively impressionistic sketch of life of the country it provides. Only in the final, more technical sentence, which itself contains one of Heidegger's characteristic neologisms, does it revert to a more obviously philosophical register. In the paragraph preceding this we have been told that what the painter presents is just a pair of shoes, with no signs of the earth attached to them, but later in the essay Heidegger dismisses the notion of the portrait presented above being a form of projection: 'If anything is questionable here, it is rather that we experienced too little in the nearness of the work and that we expressed the experience too crudely and too literally.' (161)

Heidegger's preoccupation with nearness is something which particularly interests Edward Casey: 'Why this extraordinary focus on nearness? Partly because nearness, not being a matter of distance qua interval, is precisely what cannot be measured by space and time taken as objectively parametric in nature.' (Casey 1993:281) In this respect, Heidegger's focus on nearness, here in relation to the truth of being disclosed in the painting of the shoes, resembles the smooth, haptic, tactile space evoked by Deleuze and Guattari. It is that which cannot be simply and consistently measured and organised. It is much more intuitive, complex and creatively demanding - poetic might be one way of describing it - particularly given the degree of elevated significance Heidegger attaches to the notion of poetry in the essay. He goes on to discuss the relationship between work of art, world and earth, notably in relation to the temple set in the landscape, and the intrinsically poetic nature of art in re-revealing the authentic reality

of the human relation to the earth - the truth of being, which here and elsewhere in Heidegger's work is closely related to language and thinking, building and dwelling. In *The Question Concerning Technology* (Heidegger 1978:311-341) the rejection of many of the tendencies of modern technology is again framed in terms of a call to 'a more primal truth.' :

The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already afflicted man in his essence. The rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth. (333)

Place in Heidegger might be characterised as this form of grace, this 'primal' relation to the earth which offers humanity a path to truth from which it has substantially strayed. Edward Casey offers a more detailed consideration of Heidegger's use of terms in relation to place, space and region (Casey 1993: 243-284). Here, the aim is only to make the general point and, in the next section, to develop it in relation to a brief discussion of the poetry of Charles Olson. The earth as place, in Heidegger's thought, is evocatively and poetically brought into confrontation with notions of progress, particularly in terms of technological developments. The progress of modernity is presented as a falling away from a meaningful relationship with the cosmos, usually presented as something, like Van

Gogh's shoes, almost unbearably near, that we have to escape from to allow ourselves to disclose its and our nature, but which we can lose in the same process. It is not clear whether this characterisation of the earth as intimate and primeval, demandingly revealable place, as opposed to emptyly organisable and measurable empty space is ultimately so different those encountered so far. Its emphasis, though, on encounters with the essence of specific aspects of the natural world is far more pronounced than in the previous writers considered.

### **3.2. Charles Olson: Place and The Maximus Poems**

Olson's relation to Heidegger has been extensively discussed in issues of the journal, *Boundary 2*. Olson had a view of poetry that included extending what he considered to be the disastrously limited range of its influence in twentieth century Western culture.<sup>1</sup> He can be argued to have inherited this from Ezra Pound, whose *Cantos* is one of the major epic poems of the twentieth century in English. Among Pound's aims in his epic was that of producing a poetry which had as much range and reference, as much political and social influence and relevance, as that of the ancient bards.<sup>2</sup> Like Heidegger, Pound sided for a time with the forces of fascism against what he perceived as the corrupting mediocrity of modern, market-driven democracies. His epic vision is one particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Bertens (1995) and Anderson (1998) provide usefully condensed accounts of the discussion of Olson's relation to Heidegger in *Boundary 2*.

<sup>2</sup> Bernstein (1980) provides a comparative analysis of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson in terms of the aspirations to write poetry of an epic status. His analysis is limited to developments in the later nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Matthews (1988)

founded in a study of history and aesthetics, and emerging from the aestheticism of later nineteenth century Britain and France - a significant connection with Sinclair. Among other major American poets who produced an epic work of comparable dimensions and ambitions, William Carlos Williams in *Paterson* and Charles Olson in *The Maximus Poems* both situate their long poems in a particular place. It is not my intention here to discuss the possible virtues and shortcomings of *Paterson*. It is Olson who provides, for better or worse, a notion of place with a significance and intensity comparable to that of Heidegger.

Olson begins the first part of *The Maximus Poems* railing, like Pound, against the short-sighted, superficial, commercialistic values of his society, then moves back into a consideration of what the first European settlers of his chosen place, Gloucester, Massachusetts, might have achieved had their eyes been more open to the possibilities of living in a new world which had not been blighted by the narrow reference-frame of exploitative commerce. In the second book, he moves further back in time, connecting the history of man's and the land's movements in a euhemeristic reading of ancient myths. This includes a relating of the significance of myth to twentieth century developments in both process philosophy, through Whitehead, and psychoanalytic notions of the collective unconscious, through Jung. Like Heidegger in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, where he discusses the loss involved in the dissociation of *physis* from *logos*, Olson produces a similar

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and Nichols (1990) provide a helpful introduction to ancient British bardic practice and its cultural context.



discourse on the undesirability of separating *muthos* from *logos*.<sup>3</sup> Thucydides is seen as illustrative of this trend, as opposed to Herodotus, for whom history, like life, is a process of dangerous but necessary questioning. This questioning exploration of the relation of the human psyche to the cosmos is an attitude comparable to that commended by Heidegger at the end of *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Rather as with Pound in *The Cantos*, Olson's attempt to re-found a paradise on earth does not meet with total success; the third volume of *The Maximus Poems* is haunted by feelings of despair and isolation. *The Maximus Poems* is, though, perhaps the nearest equivalent in verse to Heidegger's attempt to provide a philosophy grounded in a relationship with the earth.

Olson's approach is as much political as poetic. It deals in some detail with the local political and administrative history of Gloucester as well as the projection of human and cosmic meaning onto its geography.

Like Heidegger, Olson proposes a version of the poetic closely connected to notions of the significance of human relations with the earth, an alternative to more traditionally Christian approaches to existence and to the more materialistic, psychically barren alternatives offered by capitalism. Unlike Heidegger or Pound, whose flirtations with fascism he had the opportunity to observe, Olson does not appear to offer alternatives which are so obviously problematic in political terms. Neither is his cultural poetic founded in a version of socialism,

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<sup>3</sup> Olson's discussion of relations between *muthos* and *logos* appears in 'Letter 15' in the first volume of *The Maximus Poems* and then, in a later 'Note on Letter # 15' in the second volume.

though, as Perry Anderson has noted, he shows a considerable interest in the successes of Mao-Tse-Tung in his early poetry.<sup>4</sup>

Olson's work presents a marked focus on place and the ancient past combined with an active political vision. These are characteristics present in much American and British twentieth century verse. In the case of the British Isles, with which we are primarily concerned here, figures such as David Jones, Hugh MacDiarmid and Basil Bunting might be seen as representative in this respect, though also more recent poets like Allen Fisher, J. H. Prynne, or Iain Sinclair. Much of Raymond Williams's work might be seen as comparable with that development and his last novel bears an interesting resemblance to Olson's *The Maximus Poems* even if it provides for a different, more recognisably socialist form of politics. In all cases, another shared element is a strong degree of explicit opposition to what are seen as dominant cultural elements, whether the opposition is primarily to elements of capitalism, imperialism, or both. At the same time, a problem with Olson's poetry, replicated, to some degree by many of the writers named here is its relative lack of accessibility to a non-specialised reader and an exilic attitude towards contemporary social developments. These are problematic elements which the remaining four writers to be considered here - Gare, Carter, Williams and Sinclair – attempt to negotiate in one way or another, while sharing many of the preoccupations and attitudes of Olson's approach to place.

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson (1988) focuses on Olson's interest in Mao in the years following the war, though he goes on to dismiss *The Maximus Poems* as obscurely mystical by comparison.

### **3.3. Arran Gare: theory, politics and the earth**

Arran Gare's views on the dangers posed by developments in European thought, culture and society have been expressed in two major publications. The first of these, *Nihilism Incorporated* (1993), provided a critique of Western thinking of the last two millennia in terms of tendencies within it that encouraged attitudes of arrogance and indifference towards non-human forms of existence and the earth in general. Gare's second publication, *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (1995), is of particular relevance to the present discussion since here he focuses on ways in which elements of cultural theory might contribute to a more environmentally responsible politics at all levels, from the local to the global. The perspective provided is treated as complementary to that outlined by Paul Carter and discussed in the next section.

Like Harvey, Gare begins with an analysis of the condition of postmodernity. Harvey tends to place a primary emphasis on political and economic questions in relation to the organization of time and space. Gare, by contrast, stresses the danger of environmental catastrophe and the importance of forms of culture and thinking in leading us to, or saving us from, that catastrophe. In his opening chapter, he emphasizes the significance of forms of disorientation in Western culture, the relative loss of centrality at a global level and changes to class structure which have resulted in the rise of a new, international bourgeoisie and an

accompanying 'postmodern' culture. Like Harvey, Gare bemoans the lack of sufficiently coherent narratives, around which senses of self and society might be organised. He also expresses hostility towards what he depicts as the rise of a decentred, superficial and cynical culture of short-term sensation. At the end of this analysis, however, he sounds a more Nietzschean note, suggesting that:

(...) there is more to postmodern culture than the pseudo-radicalism and political ineffectuality of a section of the lower-middle-class. Through its refusal or inability to adopt earlier cultural forms, the practices of the new service sub-class have exposed as social constructs the basic framework of assumptions on which Western civilization has been based. We now live in one of those rare instances in which it has become possible to fully understand the nature and limitations of the whole of European civilization. (35)

This is an interesting perspective in that it seems to combine elements of a primarily Marxist analysis, with a precise focus on questions of the composition and interests of social classes, with the more apocalyptic and Nietzschean notion, not of class revolution but of a fundamental questioning of basic values. This element in his thinking draws him closer to the more radically anarchic and differential approach of Deleuze and Guattari, for whose ideas he evinces a substantial degree of approval. At the same time, in his opening analysis, he makes it quite clear that the loss

of coherent, orientating narratives is not something to celebrate; a position closer to Harvey.

What Gare proposes is in fact a new grand narrative to replace the old one(s). He attempts to lay the foundation for this not only by claims about the special nature of the era in which we live but by proposing what is essentially a synthesis of Marxist and post-structuralist critiques of dominant Western social and cultural values. This is perhaps not such an extraordinary achievement as Gare tends to make it sound in the picture he paints of 'Hegelian and Nietzschean traditions of thought as different branches of the Vicovian tradition.' (37), where Vico is seen as the original arch-opponent of early modernism and materialism in a tradition of which Descartes is the dominant founding figure. Most of the Marxists whose work has been considered here, such as Benjamin, Lefebvre and Harvey, show a considerable degree of sympathy towards notions of differentiation, and de Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari are far from unsympathetic to Marxism. More interesting is Gare's determination to include such a broad range of thinkers in the post-Vicovian synthesis he proposes, including those from the philosophical end of the world of science. One needs to add to this the determination to present the Earth, in the form of the environment and the Earth's endangered future, rather than any preferred social order, as the ultimate ground for his approach. This could be dismissed as a melodramatic form of apocalypticism but it allows Gare both a broad base for building a new cultural narrative and a

clear and positive goal for any related politics - not a new social order, but the preservation of the world. The ambitiousness of such a project is comparable to that of Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* but the emphasis is on scope and clarity rather than detail. A large number of major twentieth century thinkers are brought together under Gare's post-Vicovian umbrella. These include Heidegger, Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, Ricoeur, Lyotard, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari in the section of his book devoted to a survey of the positive aspects of post-structuralism.<sup>5</sup>

For our purposes here, the most significant figures are the first and last in this list. They make further appearances as reasonably positive figures in the next stages of Gare's argument, those comparing and combining post-structuralist and Marxist approaches to the environment and developing a 'new metaphysics' based on process philosophy. Heidegger is presented as the twentieth century thinker most capable of revealing the inadequate character of modern, technological thinking and its tendency to domination. Deleuze is presented as elaborating 'a Nietzschean philosophy of nature' (70) and his interest in Bergson is seen as indicative of his understanding of the significance of a philosophy of process. At the same time, neither philosopher is seen as beyond reproach. Heidegger is criticised for his inability to envisage the natural sciences as not necessarily 'irrevocably oriented towards the domination of the world' (114). Deleuze and Guattari's characterisation of '(...) 'good' desires as simply those which negate the desires which augment the power of the state.' is seen as inadequate: 'The promotion of such desires in the United

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<sup>5</sup> See Gare (1995: 51-72)

States over the last thirty years appears to have produced a fatter, less intelligent, more suicidal and more murderous population.’ (98). The reactionary tendencies of Heidegger and superficial, anarchic elements of Deleuze and Guattari are compensated for, in Gare’s approach, by balancing them with a greater emphasis on aspects of thinking seen as more capable of providing the foundations for a new, flexible grand narrative. Marxism is introduced in connection with a discussion of developments in environmentalist thinking. The crucial element here is seen as the failure of post-structuralist and other, related forms of thinking to convert critique into positive action. Gare is not insensitive to the fact that the most obvious implementations of Marxist thinking in the Soviet Union and elsewhere are far from being success stories. He concludes by calling for a healing of ‘the rift within the Vicovian tradition between the Hegelians and the Nietzscheans’ (107). This may not appear to be a very practical environmental measure but it does provide the next step in an argument for practical political action that could be, and in Gare’s view, must be, taken at a series of levels, from the local to the global.

The intermediate stage in this argument is provided by a discussion of perspectives from process philosophy, initially developed by Bergson and Whitehead then taken further by figures such as Ilya Prigogine and David Bohm, who emphasise the significance of semi-autonomous processes in the creation, maintenance and development of life.<sup>6</sup> This is finally connected to perspectives on narrative and history provided by figures

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<sup>6</sup> See Gare (1995:108-132)

from the world of the humanities, such as Braudel and Ricoeur.<sup>7</sup> Again, what would seem to be promoted here are forms of ‘partial mapping’ which provide a sufficient degree of orientation for individuals and cultures without becoming oppressively totalising in character. The final stage of Gare’s argument suggests the development of a new political world order based on a modified, ‘multi-levelled’ form of nationalism, where nations and other levels of social organization are seen as partly but not wholly independent eco-systems which can interact with one another in ways which allow for a sufficient degree of identification with home areas and the ability to administer and accept justice in their relations with one another. Gare suggests that if the emphasis on processes of semi-autonomous self-creation on the part of different entities can become part of a new world-view:

Nationalism can then be redefined as the commitment by a regional community, through the stories by which it defines itself, to justice within the region, where justice is understood as the appropriate recognition and acknowledgment of all beings - individuals, communities, animals and eco-systems, in thought and action. (152)

Nation here is defined in terms of a relation both to region and to the earth, in the sense of all beings regarded as part of that region. Clearly, the promotion of any form of neo-nationalism, as the term itself suggests, is fraught with negative associations and related objections, which Gare

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<sup>7</sup> See Gare (1995:135-138)



attempts to deal with, appealing to less aggressive and successful, socially equitable forms of nationalism, as represented by countries like Sweden and Switzerland.<sup>8</sup> His notion of nation is at least partly porous in that he sketches a vision of communities co-operating as part of a 'new cosmology' which

(...) makes it possible to formulate a multi-levelled nationalism, to acknowledge the significance and partial autonomy of the community of one's local region while seeing this as participating in a national community which itself has a partial autonomy, which is in turn participating in a world community which is more than the sum of all the particular communities which compose it. (153)

This might seem a somewhat idealistic proposition coming from a writer critical of the 'idealism' that he sees as characterising much post-structuralist thought.<sup>9</sup> It is, though, a coherent political vision. One might wonder at how porous the boundaries of each nation may or may not be, although the fact that they are envisioned as part of a multi-levelled system influenced by a metaphysics based on a philosophy of process presumably allows for movement between those levels. As with Edward Casey in his history of the significance of place in philosophy, Gare sees the promise of a better world in philosophical perspectives that can provide the basis for a sensitive but flexible approach to the specificities of place. His antipathy towards the service class

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<sup>8</sup> See Gare (1995:149-151)

<sup>9</sup> See Gare (1995: 99-100)

and its related interests is even more pronounced than that of Harvey and one which he more explicitly relates to questions of knowledge and power:

The rise of the new class has been associated with the rise in status of economics, business studies and information science to the dominant intellectual positions within universities and government bureaucracies –and the devaluing of anything that does not serve as an instrument of the international economy.

What is conspicuously lacking in this configuration of beliefs is any direction, any point to it at all. For the new bourgeoisie there is nothing but power for the sake of power, control for the sake of control, and conspicuous consumption on a massive scale. (11)

This a more general attack than Harvey's, not merely aimed at the pretensions of postmodernist thought but at the institutions which support the kinds of nihilism Gare portrays at the beginning of his argument. The problem is how to get from the nightmare scenario of the present, outlined in the opening parts of his study, to the desirable but remote future portrayed in its concluding stages. To say this is not to dismiss the forms of orientation he presents as over-idealistic but to put the emphasis on looking for precise ways of moving from one state to the other. In this respect, many of the perspectives presented in other sections here may be of value, as Gare himself indicates in relation to aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's thinking. If one accepts the ways in which Gare contrives his synthesis of Marxist, differential and ecological positions and the notion

of a politics and poetics based on the notion of semi-autonomous creative systems, partly but totally in communication with one another (and clearly such a position is taken in the present discussion), then the onus is on finding the means of further supporting that approach. The three perspectives represented in the remainder of this dissertation, those of Paul Carter, Raymond Williams and Iain Sinclair, might be seen as of particular relevance in this respect in terms of their connecting of a detailed regard for a specific area, a part of the earth, to a broader poetics and politics which seeks to challenge the kind of nihilism portrayed by Gare in relation to late twentieth century Western culture.

#### **3.4. Paul Carter and 'The Lie of the Land'.**

*The Lie of the Land* (1996) begins with a short introductory essay entitled 'Friday's Other Foot'. The opening briefly describes the rapid clearing of part of the land to make way for the building of a housing estate. A new culture is built on what has been flattened to provide the appropriate space:

(...) inside, photographs in rows, views through curtains, wall-to-wall carpets are the modest argot out of which a new vocabulary of place is being improvised...the lucky new residents are proud to have a place they can call their own. (1)

Benjamin's 'second nature' and Deleuze and Guattari's hostility towards interiority come to mind here, as does Heidegger's distrust of a building on and taking from the earth that is inattentive to the responsibilities involved in such an undertaking. The word 'place' appears twice but in both cases it would appear to be used with a considerable degree of disapproving irony. This is developed into a thetic proposition a page later where a distinction between 'ground' and 'place' is developed: 'We live in places off the ground; and, it is our thesis, we idolize the picturesqueness of places because we sense our ungroundedness, the fragility of our claim on the soil.' (2). As with Heidegger, place for Carter, cannot simply be a matter of construction; it must have a tangible connection with the earth. Consequently, he argues, in a way which complements Gare's approach, not merely for a sufficiently democratic politics but also 'an environmentally grounded poetics' (5).

That politics, in the broadest and deepest sense, are nonetheless an important corollary to Carter's concern with poetics is indicated by his subsequent concern with questions of communication – not only between humans and the earth but between each other. The problem of adequate communication is a theme more sympathetically treated by writers such as Habermas and Williams. It is one which Carter approaches through his interest in the European colonization of the land now known as Australia and the unfortunate nature of encounters between Europeans and natives which took place in the process of that colonisation - hence the reference

to Friday in the essay's title and the focus on Robinson Crusoe, Defoe's almost archetypal figure of colonial adventure, in its main body.

An interesting aspect of Carter's approach here is the way in which he treats these problems not only by reference to the figure of Crusoe but also through attention to the relation of meaning and movement, a primary concern in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. This is undertaken through a focus on the significance of walking which runs through various parts of the book and in this opening essay appears in terms of Crusoe's paranoid fear of the single footprint he observes:

The footprint, we might say, is already enclosed within the clearing of the colonial gaze. As a signature, as a sign of absence, as something standing in for something else, it is not understood in relation to the lie of the land, as a dialogue of left and right, marking the ground, as a historical passage. It is denied its other foot, its sense of direction, and it is this prior bracketing of the environment, symbolized by the absence of the other footprint, that precipitates the extraordinary fantasies that afflict Crusoe. There is, in other words, a direct connection between the clearing of the land and the erasure of its natural histories, and the identification of knowledge with semiosis, the science of signs. (11)

This is a lengthy citation not only because it is a key passage in Carter's essay but also because it resonates with a series of connections to many of

the writers discussed here. As with Lefebvre, Deleuze and Guattari, hostility is evinced towards a dehistoricising approach to the construction of social space as well as to semiotics, seen as a form of enclosure in itself, and like colonialism, as something perhaps meriting treatment as a pathological form of behaviour rather than as an achievement. In ways comparable to Gare's approach, what replaces Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on the relation between movement and desire, is a sufficiently orientated and careful, more Heideggerean, relation to the earth as ground.

Carter's approach is not, however, straightforwardly aggressive and escape-orientated. In contrast to the writers considered in the second chapter, he advocates a politics of diplomacy rather than one of guerilla warfare:

What would have happened if Robinson Crusoe had found another footprint? Then he would have found another and another, and a pattern would have emerged, a track...He might have grasped that the ground he stood on vibrated to the passage of other feet, and constituted an open network of social communication. (12)

This is very close to the open sociality advocated by Deleuze and Guattari, as well as to a politics of lines rather than discrete points, a walking which involves the figure of the 'tour' rather than that of the 'map', in de Certeau's terms. The modality of a remote future perfect

supports the connection between a distant past and a possible future. Crusoe's 'stiff transactions' (12) with Friday are contrasted with the 'flexible exchange between equals' (12) presented in a quotation from Montaigne, an important figure in the book, who reappears at a later stage.

The main body of *The Lie of the Land* consists of four much longer essays dealing, this time, with actual rather than fictional figures and with various aspects of culture and approaches to the land. T.G. von Strehlow, the primary subject of the first main part of the book, was concerned with providing an adequate translation of the poetics, culture and language of the Aranda people, with whom he affiliated himself. This takes its most evident form in his *Songs of Central Australia*. Carter looks at both Strehlow's failings and his achievements. In line with his comments on place in the opening essay, he notes von Strehlow's tendency to speak rather too quickly on behalf of and to idealise, nostalgically, a culture to which he could never actually belong to the extent that he desired. This is an important point in that much of the cultural criticism presented here runs the risk both of nostalgia and of potentially dubious representation in terms of writers' appeals to cultures of which they are not actually a part. The achievement of von Strehlow is presented in terms of his sensitivity to the potential importance of the agglutinative nature of Aranda linguistic formation and usage. This leads to further discussion of poetics and representation and a distinction Carter makes between 'methexis' and the more familiar 'mimesis'. This distinction, between methectic 'trace' and mimetic 'representational image' is close to Heideggerean notions of nearness and

tracks and is consistent with Carter's earlier distrust of an image-making process which first cuts itself off from the ground. The 'reverent miming' of methexis follows the contours of the place to which it relates rather than producing a self-contained reproduction of it and is best represented by Carter's recourse to a quotation from R.G. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art*. Collingwood, discussing aspects of Celtic art, considers the best way to 'reproduce the emotional effect of a dance' and notes that only 'a mind debauched by naturalism' would try to take photographs of individual dancers, whereas 'The sensible thing would be to leave out the dancers altogether and draw the pattern [of the dance] by itself.' (Carter 1996:50)

As with Deleuze and Guattari, the emphasis here is on creating and developing lines rather than filling out discrete points. The people and culture on whom von Strehlow based his life's work are an actual nomadic people, even if the lines they follow have been substantially erased by the re-surfacing culture of modern European colonialism. The connection between Aranda and Celtic art, one made by von Strehlow himself, is taken further by Carter. He notes the 'reverent miming' that G..M. Hopkins undertakes in relation to the Welsh and Anglo-Saxon bards and the development of this approach by Pound, of whom he notes that: ' (...) his language was a macaronic in-folding of poetic traditions with a view to creating an epic where all times and places were simultaneously present.' (94). He also notes how David Jones and Hugh MacDiarmid espouse quantitative metrics and the form of the epic to both disclose and preserve, as opposed to enclose and displace, the history of



locality and culture. He again notes the dangers of this approach in terms of a disposition towards a narrow, fixed notion of ground as territory and of a self-exilic tendency towards an embracing of the values and culture of the past which leaves no room or hope for development in the present and future: 'To ground a tradition in the past might be to un-ground it in the local present; groundedness might be a form of groundlessness.' (97).

A culture and poetics based on a 'peripateia of the locality' (114) emerges from the first part of Carter's book and is subsequently developed in later sections. The second part takes us to the world of Giorgione's Venice and his painting *La tempesta*. Attention is devoted to the practice of a reversed perspective where the lines of the picture do not focus on a single point but 'splay out'; a 'curvilinear' space is distinguished from a linear one, the former again disclosing as opposed to enclosing the place it represents. The importance of movement is again stressed; the 'flow' of Giorgione's painting is likened to a non-static notion of the self as presented by his contemporary, Montaigne: 'The consciousness of a Montaigne did not revolve around a stable self; the self, a comet rather than a ponderous world, wobbled under the influence of the knowledge of others, and was at all times largely in shadow.' (126). The last words of this claim refer to the importance Carter attaches to the technique of chiaroscuro, seen as indicative of the way in which painters such as Giorgione or Leonardo draw in the significance of other senses to produce sufficient attentiveness to the notion of a curvilinear space where the contiguity

of related forms is rendered proximate by a metonymical rather than a metaphorical process of perception and production. This is then related to the notion of methexis but also to the technique of 'macchiare', a blot technique where the painter builds up smudges of colour in a fashion comparable to the mosaicist. (165). In doing so he attempts to act out the way in which our perception of the world depends upon an interpretation of combinations produced in our physical environment which are always perceived from the perspective from which we see them. This is a specific illustration of a poetics closely related to the kinds of process-based, context-sensitive metaphysics we saw Gare, Deleuze and Guattari attempting to provide earlier on. It is a poetics which can negotiate relations between the developing inside and outside of the space within which it operates by developing a series of inward and outward foldings, in the production of endless but coherently oriented difference, rather than producing boundaries and flattening pavements to build a monolithic self-enclosed space of actual or potential paranoia and monomania; a tendency actualised in Stalinism and increasingly evident in the limited redevelopments and commercialised monoculture of what David Harvey terms 'market stalinism' (Harvey 1996: 437). Interestingly, Carter suggests that the techniques he describes require the conception of an open space within a closed one. (175). The focus on a limited region enables the production of a resonant consistency, a field, which can then be explored and dramatised. By seeing how one's own ground constantly shifts one can become more sensitive to the way in which this process applies to any other; space becomes heterogeneous, complex and local. The

sensitivity to the complexity of one's own 'local' contours can then be applied to an awareness of that of others.

In the final two parts of his book Carter develops this line of argument in relation to the work of a nineteenth century surveyor and then moves in his last essay towards the outlining of an integrated cultural poetics. The surveyor in question is William Light, the founder of Adelaide, for whom Carter provides an alternative 'light' history to counter the ponderously monumental official one which sees the instrument of empire attempting to do some good in an alien land before succumbing to the barbarisms of its unflattened landscape. Carter's Light is one who is highly sensitive to the weather, to atmospheric change, and who eventually and by no means unhappily merges into the landscape in which he dies.

The final chapter of Carter's book seeks, in ways which might be compared to those employed by Charles Olson, to 'break down the opposition between history and poetry' (295). This is attempted through a complex, kinaesthetic relation to the ground, as opposed to the clearing of it supported even in Heidegger's philosophy. We again move towards a poetics tolerant of a much greater degree of chaos, in the fashion of developments in process philosophy outlined by Gare and of Deleuze and Guattari's whole approach. At the same time, a definite distinction is made between the acceptance of a shifting environment in a constant process of becoming, and the reorganizing movements of capital and colonisation whose relation to the environment, human and otherwise, is

presented as one of brutal exploitation. Here, Carter is perhaps closer to Heidegger, Olson and Gare than to Deleuze and Guattari, though his depictions of the various figures he deals with indicate a willingness to accept that processes of colonial development and capital accumulation have to be negotiated rather than simply dismissed as unpalatable. In this final chapter Carter produces a combination of elements which include aspects of the work of J.H. Prynne, of Australian aboriginal culture, particularly spear throwing, and of the poetics of Cavalcanti. A dominant figure here, both rhetorical and practical, is that of ballistics, the path taken by an arrow or a bullet, or a word, to reach its target. As in the work of Deleuze and Guattari considered, no clear distinction between the real and the imaginary or between words and actions is considered acceptable. Carter begins the chapter with a discussion of the significance of walking in Prynne's verse and in fact distances both Prynne's and his own notions of nomadism from those of Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>10</sup> However, his treatment of Cavalcanti's poetics as 'a ballistic theory of love' (325) and his description of the poet's use of vocabulary, a sparse, austere, 'verbal algebra' come very close to the war-machine comprised by Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of a minoritarian writing, which constantly negotiates a shifting force-field rather than clearing and settling in an occupied, static space. There may be distinctions between the two approaches but there are also substantial convergences whose potential also needs to be attended to. Carter's evocation of a complexly inclusive, 'curvilinear' poetic gathers, in a sense reminiscent of Heidegger's use of

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<sup>10</sup> See Carter (1996: 302)

that term, the various elements offered by the locality in which it situates itself. It is then related to the notion of a more genuine learning from one culture by another, a diplomacy of 'reverent miming' which is dialogical rather than subordinate and not merely a temporary truce after waves of destructive aggression. In its way, Carter's poetics of place are as idealistic and eirenic as Gare's politics, but as with Gare they are founded in notions of dialogue, not merely with the earth but between different people.

The first part of this discussion attempted to outline and inter-relate a series of approaches in cultural theory to questions of space and place. In the first of three broad headings, the focus was predominantly on Marxist approaches which attempted to provide a sufficiently penetrating characterisation and critique of the nature of the space produced by social relations controlled to an unhealthy degree by the needs of accumulative capital. In this respect, Benjamin's observations on cities move towards an intimation of a socio-spatial critique of this kind, while also providing numerous ways of thinking the more positive possibilities of urban development. Lefebvre's more abstract attempt to get at the 'truth of space' also produces a myriad of different characterisations of types of space but focuses more precisely on the spatial element of the way in which social and cultural developments are dominated by the requirements of dominant social orders. The search for a deeper level

of analysis than that provided by discourses which are seen as superficial and collaborative with the requirements of capital might be seen as indicative of a predominantly historical materialist approach, one which is equally present in the work of David Harvey. In Harvey's work, though, an insistence on the base of hard economic realities and historical continuities as opposed to a rhetoric of ephemerality and endless difference is presented with greater polemical acerbity. At the same time, both Lefebvre and Harvey are open to the integration of a politics of difference within that of a sufficiently coherent and critical narrative of developing social emancipation. Lefebvre moves towards this in the final stages of his book and Harvey's later essay attempts to wrestle with the problem of producing a cultural politics of place which does not fall prey to the forms of fragmentation imposed by a dominant culture in ways indicated by both Lefebvre's and his own analyses.

While both writers make some telling points they are in danger, at times, of producing an overly dogmatic notion of what the truth, or truths, of any particular space might be. Here, some of the approaches they criticise might be helpful, particularly if we are aware of the problems with them that are exposed by writers like Harvey. In this respect de Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari would seem to be writers who promote forms of cultural theory which are usefully sensitive to notions of space and place.

As with Lefebvre and Harvey, in some ways more so, they accord a primary or more positive significance to space rather than place. This can

be regarded as partly a matter of individual lexical choice (thus Edward Casey sees Deleuze and Guattari's notions of space as essentially part of the philosophical reinstatement of place, despite their choice of terms) but perhaps also suggests a determination to avoid notions of fixedness, one specifically articulated in the case of de Certeau but also clearly present in Deleuze's constant philosophical characterisation of life as a process of change, difference and movement.

It is this tendency to a nostalgic or reactionary recourse to an older, better world which most obviously endangers the perspectives of those writers considered in the third chapter. Heidegger's evocative philosophy of regaining a more immediate and authentic sense of being and place is clearly one of the most powerful theoretical bases for a more ecological approach to questions of social and cultural organization but is also vulnerable to charges of dangerous conservatism. Olson's poetry, while providing a particularly substantial and place-focused alternative to the mass culture of an over-commercialised United States, tends to partly lapse into a stance of exilic mysticism.

The two Australian approaches while perhaps not as monumentally impressive as those of Olson and Heidegger, suggest a politics and poetics of place which, while very much concerned with the lost virtues of past cultures and the significance of human relations with the earth, is more amenable to dealing with the immediate problems posed by negative aspects of the dominant culture in terms of dialogue and adaptation rather

than outright antagonism or proud disdain. In this sense they share something with the writers discussed in the second chapter. Carter's poetics of the ground are perhaps still in some danger of reproducing a form of social conservatism. His emphasis on the significance of mobility goes some way to countering the charge of reproducing a poetics of social rather than geographical place, but needs to be treated with caution, like much of the twentieth century poetry he holds up for our approval. Gare's politics provide a more obviously catholic synthesis of the egalitarian, the differential and the ecological, though his advocacy of the nation as the most effective form of resistance to global capitalism, while usefully modified by a relational regionalism, still suggests a potential problem in terms of possible returns to essentialised homelands. All of these approaches provide a significantly valuable contribution to a poetics and politics of space and place which is opposed to currently dominant trends. In this context, one should not look for a single perfect synthesis of their perspectives but rather focus on combinations of their elements, recognising that there are other perspectives with which they are also capable of combining.



## **Part Two**

## Chapter Four : The Earlier Fiction of Raymond Williams

The three chapters in this part consider the fictional work of Raymond Williams and principally his last, unfinished work, *People of the Black Mountains*. Williams, as social and cultural critic and as writer of fiction, can be argued to have developed an approach which is both oppositional, in its relation to what he considered to be exploitative social and cultural developments, and socially democratic in the sense that he was constantly seeking to explain and explore complicated issues not merely in relation to his immediate, academic peer group but to a wider audience. The story of his interventions as critic and public intellectual is well known and represented by books such as *Culture and Society* (1957), *The Long Revolution* (1961), and *The Country and the City* (1977), to name what are three of his most highly regarded contributions in this sphere. His fictional writing is rather less celebrated and has been accorded relatively little attention in terms of full-length studies. The exception to this is the study by Tony Pinkney and some points regarding William's fiction prior to *People of the Black Mountains* will be made with the help of Pinkney's studies of both Williams's and D.H. Lawrence's fiction.

Williams is generally regarded as one of a handful of key figures in twentieth century British literary and cultural criticism, comparable with D.H. Lawrence, T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis or George Orwell. His particular contribution was perhaps that of extending and developing the work of F.R. Leavis in the direction of a broader characterisation of what

constitutes culture and a more sharply political analysis of its production and consumption. His work provides a bridge to that of figures of a later generation, such as Terry Eagleton or Stuart Hall. Williams himself is often grouped with Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson as one of the founding figures of cultural studies in Britain. He is a writer who, like Lawrence and Hoggart, has his roots in an essentially working-class background but who, like Stuart Hall, a West Indian, or Terry Eagleton, a Mancunian of Irish descent, also comes from an area peripheral to the power-centre of London and its surrounding area. Tony Pinkney notes that Williams terms himself a 'Welsh European', a characterisation which has implications in relation to the dominant cultural paradigm of a predominantly southern Englishness. These implications express themselves in terms of a constantly developing enquiry into the possibilities of more fully democratic forms of social and cultural life which involves greater investigation of British relations with Europe and other parts of the world.

In terms of fictional work, Williams is a writer with relatively clear antecedents who sees himself as part of a discernible line of development in the English (and Welsh) novel.<sup>1</sup> These include George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence, as well as, to some extent, George Orwell. The 'knowable community' whose implications are explored in *The Country and the City*, the distinction between a critically active relation

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<sup>1</sup> His own characterisation of this influence is provided in the essay in 'Region and Class in the Novel' in *Writing and Society* (Williams 1983) See his essay 'The Welsh Industrial Novel' in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (Williams 1980) for observations on the Welsh tradition.

to the centre and the picture of a quaint provincialism set in aspic in the essay on 'Region and Class in the Novel' (1983), as well as a concern with the progressive development of social relations and a creative sense of community through generations born and living in the same area, are all issues raised by both his critical and fictional writing. Some parallels might also be drawn with other writers. Comparisons with Charles Olson become interesting in relation to *People of the Black Mountains* and will be considered later, but those with the work of Habermas and Lefebvre also merit attention .

Habermas is not an obvious figure to refer to in terms of preoccupations with space or place, though, as noted earlier, place is often defined in the dictionary in terms of associations with the public square.<sup>2</sup> This aspect of Habermas's thought, the preoccupation with a rigorous definition of social conditions appropriate to the development and maintenance of successful communication, is related to contextual surroundings of actions, including those of speech and other forms of communication. As was also noted earlier, this is a significant aspect of Paul Carter's approach to a politics and poetics of place and equally relevant to that of Arran Gare. The importance Williams attaches to successful communication and to communications systems in general is difficult to overestimate and occurs

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<sup>2</sup> My main reference here is to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Habermas 1989

in his fiction as well as his theory.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true of *People of the Black Mountains* which is especially concerned with the encounter between different cultures and consequent problems of communication.

The other substantially Marxist thinker with an interest in questions of social space is Lefebvre, whose 'long' history of space as socially produced is of particular relevance when considering a work like *People of the Black Mountains*. Lefebvre's study of the social production of space was published at about the same time as Williams's *The Country and the City*, which also raises substantial questions about the geopolitical nature of literary production in the British context. Like Lefebvre, Williams is a writer from a rural background, one far from overwhelmed by the sophistications of metropolitan-based cultural theorising and, like Lefebvre, a figure whose writings have had a substantial influence on recent generations of British and American social and cultural geographers.

#### **4.1. Tony Pinkney: D.H. Lawrence, Raymond Williams**

As with the cultural theorists considered in the first part of this thesis, Tony Pinkney will be considered here as a writer of significance in his own right. In his studies of D.H. Lawrence and in particular of Raymond Williams, Pinkney, a critic strongly connected with the development of ecological or 'eco-criticism' in Britain, as well as with the work of another

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<sup>3</sup> See O'Connor's 'A Raymond Williams Bibliography' in Eagleton (1989) for a full survey in this respect

early 'green' socialist, William Morris, indicates a strong interest in issues pertaining to space and place.<sup>4</sup> In *D.H. Lawrence* (1990) this takes the form of a focus on the socio-political significance of the regional element in Lawrence's earlier fiction up to and including *The Rainbow*.

Heidegger is not mentioned as an influence on Pinkney's own work. Nor is he included as a thinker whose attitudes might be compared with those of Lawrence, though an approach reminiscent of Heidegger's emphasis on 'nearness' emerges in Pinkney's analysis of Lawrence's first novel, *The White Peacock*.<sup>5</sup> Pinkney sees Lawrence as divided between a powerfully sensual and local celebration of the work and life of a local, regional England and a more distanced, imperial, British stance. Pinkney associates the latter with the 'better self' of the more conservative Matthew Arnold. This distinction is further developed in his reading of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* where he suggests that the books represent two kinds of modernism. The earlier book is associated with the gothic and with the earlier, more socialist and expressive phase of Bauhaus architectural design and thinking.<sup>6</sup> Particularly significant in this respect is the space of the cathedral in *The Rainbow*. The cathedral and the character of Ursula are seen as representative of a fluid, 'female', localised, gothic line of modernism in contrast to the emergence of a dry, hard, international and classicist line represented by various writers, from Pound and the Imagists through Hemingway and Joyce, to Beckett and

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<sup>4</sup> Pinkney also acted as editor of the journal *News from Nowhere*.

<sup>5</sup> Pinkney's concern here is with Lawrence but his perspective seems comparable to that of Heidegger.

even Deleuze and Guattari. *Women in Love* is seen as Lawrence's attempt to come to terms with and critique this latter tendency, though Pinkney regards the later work as succumbing to much more than resisting it. There is much in Pinkney's argument which is reminiscent of the attacks of Colin McCabe (1979) and others on classic English realism and on finding an effective alliance between Marxist and post-structuralist perspectives on literary and cultural production. Pinkney concludes with a positive reckoning of Lawrence's lasting contribution to the unending 'anti-classicist struggle' and Derrida's notion of phallogocentrism is enlisted in that struggle in the last pages of the book. Even here, though, Pinkney continues to focus on Lawrence's writing in relation to the earth and to architecture as well as to questions of textuality and political allegiance.

The monograph on Lawrence is a provocative piece of work which is about a great deal more than Lawrence in its advocacy of a sensually enhanced, socialist politics of locality. This attention to questions of place and building is further developed in the book on Williams. The introductory section makes a number of basic claims: firstly, that Williams can be seen as a postmodern as much as, or perhaps more than, a realist novelist; secondly, that he is both '...the most determinedly local and formidably international of writers' (Pinkney 1991:11); thirdly, that his fiction deserves far more attention and careful critical analysis than it has so far received.

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<sup>6</sup> See Pinkney (1990: 75-77). A more detailed account of the early years of the Bauhaus is provided in *Bauhaus* (Feierabend & Kunemann 1999)

Pinkney's analysis of Williams's first novel, *Border Country* (1960) focuses on a number of ways in which time and space are presented. The difference of rhythms between London and the area of the country to which Will returns is noted and is suggestive of Lefebvre's notion of rhythmanalysis. The eventual move towards long-durational rhythms in *People of the Black Mountains* is also noted. This is a characteristic it shares with *The Rainbow*, the novel which Pinkney sees as Lawrence's most positive achievement.

Another series of concepts which Pinkney introduces towards the beginning of his analysis are those of 'habitation' and 'centering'. The first is derived from J.P.Ward's earlier study\* of Williams which also concentrates, in ways which Williams develops, on the significance of 'small human actions and gestures' (\*quoted in Pinkney 1991:22).

Pinkney observes here both an attention to details of places and actions of this kind and the resonance of words like 'centred', 'easy' and 'settlement' in Williams's work. He notes that Williams intuitively probes the shifting, complex and disturbing relations between different spaces and their various boundaries. The space which Pinkney examines in *Border Country* is that of rooms and its carceral and cancerous nature in a novel where ' (...) rooms in general haunt its imagination.' (31). This last comment also serves to indicate how Pinkney emphasises the way in which, despite the presence of a pedagogical element ('The novel seems, almost, to be administering to us a lesson in 'the theory of rooms...' (31) ), much of the effectiveness



of Williams's writing in relation to space and place operates at an intuitive, unconscious level.

The analysis of *Border Country* emphasises questions of movement and repression (a significant aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's work). While Pinkney notes that there is a distinct contrast between the charted, impersonal mobility of the metropolis and the easier, more centred and personable movements of Will's home area, he points out that negative forms of social space can occur anywhere. He makes an interesting distinction between active and passive spaces presented in the novel and the ways in which the still image of a landscape can produce a dead and contagious 'anti-space' (37-8). There is a constant attempt to challenge the still, fetishised representation of the rural with the more active, historicised presentation of a constantly, if slowly developing relation between land and people, most satisfactorily approached, in terms of form, in Williams's last novel, Pinkney claims.(51-52). At this point, he refers to de Certeau's notion of the tour in contrast to the map and also notes the plural and contested nature of *histories* in Williams's fiction, another significant point of comparison with de Certeau:

All these voices, styles, forms, all these *histories*, jostle for predominance in a novel whose own grand historical project, the recovery of a past both personal and social, will grant them each their appointed place and local valid in its own overarching temporal framework. (37)

Rather as in Arran Gare's vision of an international community sensitive to difference and region at various levels and of various kinds, there is an emphasis on the crowded space of plurality in Williams's narrative. The 'recovery' of the past suggests Benjamin in his comments in the fifth and sixth sections on *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (Benjamin 1992: 247), the notion of 'appointed place' is perhaps in danger of suggesting that there is a fixed place for every one. This is reminiscent of Pinkney's polemical stance against certain forms of modernism in favour of a sensual immediacy of relation to the environment, an approach which, as observed earlier, needs to be treated with a degree of caution. Gare's approach to a grand narrative in this respect is inspired as much by aspects of process philosophy as by socialist visions of unalienated labour .

A socialist critique of the inadequacies of dominant forms of social organization and cultural reproduction is fundamental to Williams as well as Pinkney. *Second Generation* (1964), Williams's Oxford novel, is one which, as Pinkney notes, focuses especially on questions of alienated labour and a culturally emptied and functionally exploitative space of living. In such circumstances, even in the later part of the twentieth century, the opposition to the dominant social forces which impose such conditions can be almost as devoid of humanity as the system they oppose. Again, one aspect of hope in a considerably bleak novel which Pinkney attends to in his analysis is that of meaningfully inhabited place; 'From the beginning, the novel asks what kind of feasible human habitation,

what kind of *place*, could we imagine, desire and struggle for in this space-ridden culture.’ (57). Here, Pinkney reverses the positive-negative valency accorded to ‘space’ and ‘place’ (albeit in inverted commas) by de Certeau, again indicating a tendency towards a more Heideggerean authenticity of habitation. His favoured, and frequently quoted, source tends to be Bachelard, particularly the Bachelard of *The Poetics of Space*, the ‘ (...) Bachelardian craving for a more radical kind of curling, an ontologically deep kind of inhabiting.’ (60) The last phrase in this sentence is again reminiscent of Heidegger, though radical curling might suggest something of Paul Carter’s poetics with their emphasis on the advantages of the curvilinear.<sup>7</sup> Pinkney’s analysis of Williams’s second novel focuses particularly on the dis-orientated, dis-located, de-nuded and fragmented body. Hands are seen not only in terms of the metonymy for members of a work force but even in terms of Williams’s memory of his own hairy hands in comparison to those of the more middle-class Leavis (68).

The analysis of Williams’s next two novels focuses on their proximity in form to that of the popular thriller. This is perhaps particularly the case with *The Volunteers* (1978), which takes the form of a political thriller, but *The Fight For Manod* (1979), as Pinkney notes, also contains elements of other forms of popular fiction, such as sci-fi, horror and gothic fiction. The central theme is that of proposals for a new town in an area in danger of extinction due to depopulation. One of the main

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<sup>7</sup> See Carter (1996: 416)

characters, Matthew Price of *Border Country*, older now, has to mediate between various approaches, most of them vitiated by scepticism and cynicism. The novel, as Pinkney observes, is close to being apocalyptic. It is also a novel about building; Pinkney notes several parallels with the work of Ibsen, particularly *The Master Builder*.<sup>8</sup> The themes of gothic and building emerge in Pinkney's analysis of *The Rainbow* but here the emphasis is on horror and apocalypse rather than hope - a modality also present, if in rather more ironic vein, in Iain Sinclair's work. Pinkney observes that both of these novels have the character of 'limit-texts' (71) where Williams challenges the boundaries of more conventional notions of what constitutes a serious or popular genre novel.

Williams's last two novels, *Loyalties* (1985) and *People of the Black Mountains* (1989) have a more pronounced historical content. Pinkney comments on Williams's own tendency to agree rather too readily, in an interview with Michael Ignatieff, with the hypothetical charge that his characters are rather less convincing psychologically than they are historically and politically (110). This he sees as supporting his notion that Williams himself had a tendency to take his fictional work rather less seriously than it merited. *Loyalties* deals with divisions in British culture which are social as much as geographical, following the diverging careers and affiliations of a generation closely parallel to Williams's own. Pinkney is again interested in gothic and grotesque elements in the novel and focuses on the figure of Nesta, the wife of the central working class male

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<sup>8</sup> See Pinkney (1991: 82-85) for a discussion of the similarity of Williams's Matthew Price in *The Fight For Manod*, to Halvard Solness in *The Master Builder*.

figure, the 'real' as opposed to natural father of her son Gwyn. Nesta is an 'amateur' painter, who is revealed as considerably talented and Pinkney discusses one of the most powerful scenes in the book where she shows Gwyn a picture of Bert she made shortly after he had been seriously injured in real fighting, as opposed to the spying of some of her more educated friends. The following passage describes the painting:

It was immediately Bert: the face was never in doubt. The oils were streaked and dabbed to the domination of the jagged eye; hard, pitted lines of grey and silver and purple pulling down the socket. The whole face, under the cropped hair, was distorted around these lines which pulled from the dark hollow. Angry streaks of crimson and purple pulled beyond the hard shoulder (...) It was terrible beyond any likeness, as if the already damaged face was still being broken and pulled apart, as all the lines seemed to move. (Williams 1989: 345)

Pinkney makes a number of points about the relation of this scene and its use of portraits to other gothic texts, such as *Jane Eyre* or *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, but pays less attention to the way in which the painting acts as a profound point of communication between not merely painter but also mother and son - two generations again. Gwyn reacts inadequately to the painting, judging it in formal terms rather than in those of the human suffering which his mother represents and almost reproduces aurally in her grotesque scream of anguish at his response. Nesta insists, with

embarrassing directness on the painful reality of human experience which art can and should represent. There is no question here of painting for painting's sake, the picture is an expressive vehicle of communication and it is Nesta, the older, symbolic nature of whose name Pinkney notes, and who perhaps more than anyone in the novel delivers the truth of the experiences and divisions that it witnesses.

Pinkney devotes a considerable part of his analysis to the final novel, *People of the Black Mountains*. Many of the themes already covered – building, habitation, the gothic and the grotesque appear. Place rather than space is again focused on, as he notes that: 'In every generation... a conflict is fought out between those for whom place is the ultimate value and those for whom it is a Gothic catacomb, frustrating what they see as their authentic life elsewhere.' (128)

This contested sense of place partly occurs in relation to another battle, between the narratives of science and tradition, and Pinkney is equally interested in the narrative complexity of this novel, seeing it as an example of what Linda Hutcheon, in *The Poetics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon 1988), terms 'historiographic metafiction'. Among the characteristics referred to is the interweaving of individual stories with the framing interludes of 'Glyn to Elis', but also the way in which stories and histories are constantly discussed and questioned in the novel. This is a characteristic approached in similar fashion by Arran Gare, who, like

Pinkney, focuses on the substantive effects of narratives on cultural change and reproduction.

Also relevant here is the way in which the novel itself is very clearly and self-consciously a form of history-writing, one which benefits from comparison with other attempts to do the same thing in more directly poetic form, as in Olson's *The Maximus Poems*. William's novel might be seen as a form of postmodern *Mabinogion* in certain respects, although, as with other inheritors of the traditions of Taliesin and Aneurin (Basil Bunting, like Olson, strongly influenced by Pound, comes to mind as much as anyone more immediately Welsh or Brythonic), the comparison will have little purchase without a strong sense of its current relevance.

Pinkney's approach to Williams's fiction draws attention to the powerful, if often unconscious, nature of its spatial perceptions but at times is connected to a poetics and politics of sensual locality which needs to be treated with a certain degree of caution in terms of its proximity to more nostalgic and reactionary approaches. The approach presented in relation to *People of the Black Mountains* in the next two chapters will include consideration of his comments on that novel, but also attempt to relate the novel to a broader series of theoretical perspectives.

## Chapter Five : People of the Black Mountains 1 : The Beginning

The aim in this and the next chapter is to provide a relatively detailed explication and analysis of the two completed volumes of *People of the Black Mountains* in order to indicate how they might contribute to the development of a relational poetics and politics of place. The term 'novel' is used to describe the book but it cannot be categorised simply either as a work of fiction or of history. It was noted in the previous chapter that Tony Pinkney, using Linda Hutcheon's term, describes it as 'historiographic metafiction'.<sup>1</sup> Pinkney is very positive about the novel's value but it has not received universal admiration. Fred Inglis chooses Carmen Calil, Williams's publisher, to provide a representative assessment in his biography of Williams. Her quoted comments include: 'extraordinary but difficult to read; 'he is no novelist, his didacticism is wearisome; not a man to whom comedy, or any comic leavening of life came easily; immensely impressive (...) but (...) it's not very good.'<sup>2</sup> Such comments do not indicate overwhelming enthusiasm and it is not difficult, particularly if, unlike Inglis or Calil, one takes a less than sympathetic attitude to Williams's fiction in general, to imagine other readers encountering similar problems; Raymond Williams is not David Lodge, as a comparison of sales figures no doubt would show. Calil's comments include a degree of negative assessment from the perspective of trying to market Williams's novel as a piece of entertaining as much as

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<sup>1</sup> See Pinkney 1991: 130-141



enlightening fiction. However, if the most negative aspects are put to one side, her characterisation is of an extraordinary and impressive, if somewhat didactic and humourless piece of writing. The same, of course, might be said of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a comparison which can serve as an introduction to possible connections between Williams's last novel and the epic poem as genre.

Discussion of one modern epic poet, Charles Olson, has already been included here. *People of the Black Mountains* bears an interesting relation to *The Maximus Poems*, working with a comparably vast time-scale and focusing on a geographical area of comparable dimensions. William's novel may not be the most accessible of novels but the difficulties it presents in terms of arcane reference are minor in comparison to Olson's poem. In this respect, *People of the Black Mountains* has the potential to provide a bridge between relatively arcane works like *The Maximus Poems*, and forms of imaginative literature more accessible to a broader readership. It was noted in the previous chapter that Pinkney provides an approach to the significance of place partly comparable with that of Heidegger. The comparison might also apply to Williams here; the attention and valuation afforded to the qualities of place and groundedness in the novel sometimes borders on the essentialistic and mystical.

Like Olson's poem in relation to the United States, Williams's novel provides a distinctive perspective on the history of the British Isles. Both

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<sup>2</sup> See Inglis 1995: 292-3

works suggest the possibility of an alternative course for a future history to take and, in this respect, have something in common with Paul Carter's approach to relations between natives and European colonisers of Australia. Carter tries to imagine what would have happened if they had been less paranoid in their outlook and adopted a more open attitude to the place in which they found themselves. So does Olson, and in both cases interpretations of actual historical figures are employed to support this perspective. Williams adopts a comparable approach but uses fictional characters for his central figures, usually presenting any actual, historical figures in a relatively negative light. His narrative moves from a troubled present to a distant history which needs to be recovered and redirected. Both the epic and pedagogical elements in *People of the Black Mountains* bear a tangible relation to the work of earlier Marxist writers such as Brecht, Lukacs, or even Bloch.<sup>3</sup> The forty stories of the novel might be characterised as a form of Brechtian epic drama in the way they provide the reader with an open-ended tale, but one whose pedagogical element is clearly discernible. Williams's approach to realism also bears a strong relation to that of Lukacs. His concerns are with the everyday life and problems of people from less privileged social classes, particularly when dealing with those holding greater power. At the same time, he is equally concerned with the relation of people to the natural forces exerted by the places in which they live. Like Lefebvre, Williams has a 'double vision' with respect to his perspective on both social and ecological

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<sup>3</sup> See Pinkney (1989) for a discussion of the relation of Williams's writing, both fictional and theoretical, to the work of Bloch, Brecht and Lukacs.

issues. These characteristics have made him an influential writer on geographers with a socialist or Marxist orientation such as Harvey and in this respect he can be compared to John Berger as a novelist. Berger, particularly in his later trilogy of novels on the life of French peasants, also focuses on relations between land and people and on questions of social deprivation and injustice.<sup>4</sup>

A further connection with Williams's focus on a particular area might also be made with approximately contemporaneous writers who also focus on specific places or areas. In this context, the north-west of England is a useful area on which to focus briefly in that it borders on parts of Wales and shares with it an ambiguous attitude to the dominant socio-geographical area of British and English culture, the south-east of England. The north of England is not a nation but it can be classified as a region or a number of regions. The role of poets, novelists and historians as confidence builders in such areas can be significant. For example, two writers from the north-west, Glyn Hughes and Frank Lean have sought, in different ways, to provide their readers with evocations of the Pennines area and Manchester, respectively, which help to furnish such places with a more detailed and thereby more meaningful identity. In Hughes' novels, the relationship between the landscape, the social and technological development of the region and the political problems of earlier centuries are all dramatised in ways which contribute to providing the area with an identity which is more than that of the declining industrial north.<sup>5</sup> Lean's detective novels, set in

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<sup>4</sup> See Berger (1979, 1987, 1990)

<sup>5</sup> See Hughes 1987

Manchester, are aimed at a slightly different readership, but explore numerous areas of the city and contemporary developments within them.<sup>7</sup> Novels like these employ forms of mapping and history which can help provide a more detailed and equitable sense of cultural diversity within the different places and regions of the British Isles. Williams's approach offers a variety of means for developing such initiatives.

Attention might also be drawn here to the work of historians of Celtic culture such as Peter Berresford Ellis in providing alternative and relatively accessible versions of the nature and significance of earlier historical periods. One such study considers the 'dark ages' between the withdrawal of Roman troops and the Norman Conquest and suggests that the Battle of Brunanburgh rather than that of Hastings might be the crucial one for the future course of British history.<sup>8</sup> John Cowper Powys ( who falls outside the period covered here but whose novels are concerned with a metaphysics based on a sense of place) also set his last novel, *Porius* in the same period.<sup>9</sup> Examination of the potential of less well recorded periods of the history of the British Isles is a characteristic shared by the first volume of *People of the Black Mountains*.

Brief initial mention might also be made here of Williams's possible relations to de Certeau or Deleuze and Guattari. *People of the Black Mountains* can be compared to aspects of de Certeau's work in that it is concerned with the problems of people living in an area whose custody and

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<sup>7</sup> See Lean 2000 (a), (b), (c)

<sup>8</sup> See Ellis 1993

domination is constantly and complexly contested, usually by ‘outsiders’ rather than ‘insiders’, to use Relph’s terms.<sup>10</sup> The inhabitants of the area are often depicted devising tactics to cope with the strategies of those with more power than themselves as well as with the natural environment. In relation to Deleuze and Guattari, Williams’s novel offers a positive, co-operative approach to social and political evolution, (perhaps comparable to Bergson’s approach to natural evolution) despite a considerable emphasis on the tragic developments it can involve. Deleuze and Guattari take this further in their evocation of a complexly shifting chaosmos where sociality is something which needs to be constantly fought for in the face of tendencies in social orders to organise differential elements in human behaviour in repressive ways. *People of the Black Mountains* is full of stories of characters whose behaviour is, retrospectively, beneficial to the region in which they are situated, but who are persecuted in the name of social conventions. As in some of Williams’s earlier novels, relations between a distant centre and a particular area are of marked significance. The notion of elusive, ‘nomadic’ situations and forms of behaviour, escaping and subverting the more established power of the centre(s) becomes relevant to a history which itself might aptly be termed nomadic.

### **5.1. The Beginning: Introductory**

The first volume of *People of the Black Mountains* covers a period stretching from 23,000 B.C. to 51. A.D. This means that most of it deals

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<sup>9</sup> See Powys 1951

with a period of time that falls outside the usual range of histories of Britain. Williams is, in effect, dealing with prehistory - the province, until relatively recently, of archaeologists and researchers of mythology rather than what is usually understood as historians. This characteristic of Williams's novel links it to the concerns of Olson, Heidegger, Carter and even Deleuze and Guattari, all of whom are concerned to free themselves from what they perceive as the limiting boundaries of modern conceptualisations of history and historiography. Williams's view of history is distinctly modern in its concern with progress, but is also concerned with the more conservative notion of attachment to the same place. Here, comparisons with cultural theorists like Lefebvre, or historians like Braudel are also relevant. We are presented with a long history whose morphology, like that of the landscape, puts into a different perspective changes viewed as enormous by historians with more short-term concerns. At the same time, there is again a danger of the lapse into a yearning for a pre-industrial haven outside of the reaches of modern capitalist social relations.

The novel opens with a bardic invocation entitled 'First'. This is preceded by two sketch maps of the relevant area, partly reminiscent of editions of the novels of Hardy, and perhaps more distantly of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. In the opening invocation - 'You now hold this place in your hand' (1) - body and place are brought into an intimate relation which one might connect to notions of orientation and centring presented earlier.

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<sup>10</sup> See Relph (1976: 61-2) for his use of these terms in relation to a typology for the identities of places.

Attention to this relation is a major constituent of Edward Casey's study of the re-emergence of place as a significant force in modern philosophy. Casey dates this development from Kant's essay of 1768 which positions the body at the centre of subjectively oriented perceptions of place.<sup>11</sup> He views this perception as being more fully developed in the twentieth century, firstly by Husserl, Whitehead and Merleau-Ponty, then, most powerfully by Heidegger and, more recently, by a series of French thinkers, including Deleuze and Guattari. Olson's approach in *The Maximus Poems* is also based on notions of projection from the body, though many of the more substantial aspects of his approach were reduced in subsequent critical reception, as Perry Anderson notes, to a relatively trivialising focus on the formal attributes of 'projective verse'.<sup>12</sup>

It is made clear in the novel, partly by the date attached to each tale on the list following the maps, that we are dealing with questions of time and history as much as those of place and geography. The holding of the place involves a perception of all the generations of its human inhabitants, which are 'distinct but all suddenly present' (2). This is not the straightforwardly linear conceptualisation of a history of progress. It seems to move towards the redemptive kind suggested by Benjamin in his *Theses on The Philosophy of History* where the injustices of the past as much as those of the present have to be fought against.<sup>13</sup> Being

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<sup>11</sup> Casey (1997: 201-242) includes a chapter on Kant and subsequent developments in phenomenology which sees the focus on the body as the crucial development in philosophical approaches to place and space from the time of Kant.

<sup>12</sup> See Anderson (1998:15-16)

<sup>13</sup> The reference here is to the observation that 'Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will

familiar with a place means feeling all of its history as a multiple contemporaneity. The form of Williams's novel, with its multiple, momentary episodes, supports this perception.

The first of a series of framing narratives, entitled *Glyn to Elis*, follows the invocation. The form of the narrative involves a deeper perception of place and a sense of maintaining or reviving historical continuity. The grandson, in danger of being lost himself in the increasing darkness, searches for a lost grandfather, whom he addresses as 'Taid' in the older and more local Welsh language rather than in the more recently imported English in which the novel is predominantly but not totally written.

Orientation in a time of darkness, a motif also running through *The Maximus Poems*, is a constant element in these framing narratives. Glyn's limited opportunities for visual perception make him rely on memory and feeling to guide his way. The theme of wandering or being lost in darkness has multiple overtones, suggestive both of a search for redemption and of contemporary disorientation. The element of gothic observed by Pinkney in much of Williams's later fiction seems to be present and these perceptions might be connected to those of other Marxist writers. Jameson's 'cognitive mapping' and Deleuze and Guattari's 'haptic space' (as opposed to the visible space which can be mapped by less local and more powerful forces such as the state) are two examples.<sup>13</sup> The attitude of partial distrust towards the state and

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not be safe from the enemy if he wins.' (Benjamin 1992: 247) but much of the essay has some relevance to Williams's approach to the writing of history in *People of the Black Mountains*.

<sup>13</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 492-499



professional academia, evinced in Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a nomadic science, is also perceptible in the contrast between Glyn's feelings towards Elis and those towards his natural father and stepfather, a professional historian and politician, respectively. The distinction Williams makes is not between state and nomad but between professional and amateur, but the problem of enclosure and the repression of vitality is addressed. Professional historians are negatively characterised in terms of their attitudes to amateurs and their lack of openness and commitment to the places and people they study:

Pushing away, often coldly, the enthusiasms of the amateur they would reduce what they were studying to an internal procedure; in the worst cases to material for an enclosed career. If lives and places were being seriously sought, a powerful attachment to lives and to places was entirely demanded. (10)

This is a different perception from that relating to the practitioners of nomad science made by Deleuze and Guattari, but the figure of the troublesome intellectual who will not fit smoothly into the patterns organised by the state or even the local society recurs regularly in Williams's treatment of place.

Like Elis, Glyn is ultimately, if not immediately, at home in and deeply sympathetic to the landscape he explores. The evocation of the landscape he walks through has resonances with the work of Wordsworth,

Heidegger or Olson. It does not have the smoothness and plasticity of a model, any more than the intellectuals referred to, including Elis, have the smoothness of the professional state functionary, but while not easy or comfortable to live with, both the landscape and Elis are presented as ultimately to be learned from and trusted despite initially disquieting features. A similar characterisation might be applied to Williams's novel itself. The relation between place, thought and memory is further extended in a later passage:

Solid traces of memory! The mountains were too open, too emphatic to be reduced to a personal recollection; the madeleine, the shout in the street. What moved, if at all, in the moonlit expanse was a common memory, over a common forgetting. In what could be seen as its barrenness, under this pale light, there might be the sense of *tabula rasa*: an empty ground on which new shapes could move. Yet that ideal of a dissident and dislocated mind, that illusion of clearing a space for wholly novel purposes, concealed, as did these mountains, old and deep traces, along which lives still moved. An empty and marginal land, in which the buried history was still full and general was waiting to be touched and moved. (11)

Pinkney discusses some of Williams's reservations about aspects of modernism in his introduction to *The Politics of Modernism* (Pinkney 1989: 1-29) These include a degree of wariness about excitement at the potential of technological development and related

technical and individualistic exhibitionism in the sphere of modernist, avant-garde literature. That wariness is partly reflected here. The continuity and development of common cultures is preferred to what are presented as the individualistic epiphanies of Proust's 'madeleine' or Joyce's 'shout in the street'. The emphasis is on reawakening older, more constant elements, now partly forgotten and marginalised. The description of the landscape has a gothic, haunted feel to it, with its 'empty and marginal land' and 'buried history' but 'waiting to be touched and to move' again emphasises the tactile and the emotional as well as the dynamic. A connection is made with the more mythical notion of resurrection, of bringing the land back to life in troubled times. Again, one might link this to Carter in his attention to cultures which respect the 'lie of the land' as opposed to clearing it for the imposition of a new project. Like Carter, Williams refers more positively to traces, which tend to be seen as grounding discourse, than to the important but more ambiguous role of signs, which are portrayed as more subject to complex game-playing and devious forms of interpretation. This is particularly true of the second volume, *The Eggs of the Eagle*, which takes its title from a story concerned with the problematic nature of reading the meaning of signs and dreams.<sup>15</sup> Williams tends towards Lefebvre's approach in insisting, if not quite so polemically as Lefebvre, on the way in which discourses are grounded in

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<sup>15</sup> The reference here is to Carter's reading of the trace as representative of a sympathetic relationship with the land, in contrast to the more abstract character of the sign which is seen as abstracted from it. This is the basis of his distinction between *methexis* and *mimesis*. See Carter (1996:11-12) for an introduction to the distinction.

something deeper and less accessible to consciousness. In Lefebvre this is termed the social production of space, in Williams the power and influence of place. There is also an important relation, in a history of place which has both an epic and regenerative element, to the romances of John Cowper Powys or Tolkien. Both Pinkney and Bramwell note connections between socialist and more conservative reactionary forms of thinking and those connected with attention to ecological considerations in the earlier part of the century.<sup>16</sup>

The insistence on the long history of a specific landscape is further developed in later paragraphs. What Glyn experiences is as much a sense of place as of history:

It was more than a sequence of particular moments – the specific times, the changing ways, of the extended history. It was a more settled, permanent sense, of men and women, on these mountains, handling earth, stone, trees, grass, animals: people deep and gone into this place but still seeming to shape it. (12)

Glen Cavaliero, in a discussion of ‘numinous landscapes’ in twentieth century English fiction, refers to *People of the Black Mountains* as ‘a novel with a powerful rendering of timelessness in a particular place’ (Cavaliero

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<sup>16</sup> See Bramwell (1989: 104-132) for a more detailed account of literary developments in twentieth century England relating ecological and mythical concerns with the restoration of a lost land. She includes consideration of H.J. Massingham, Henry Williamson and J.R.R. Tolkien, among others.

1995:257). The reference is only a footnote but connects Williams to the other, earlier writers Cavaliero is primarily interested in discussing, including Hardy, Lawrence and John Cowper Powys.<sup>17</sup> Williams is not a primarily mystical writer but the significance attributed to place in his novels is as marked as his sense of history - which is substantially derived from that sense of place. Place, history and people are further connected in the ensuing paragraph where a regional geography of the mind is proposed, one which then develops into an alternative, multiplicitous form of relation:

Perhaps the different kinds of memory were different regions of the mind. At his books and maps in the library, or in the house in the valley there was a common history which reconstituted memory, a cast of mind which could be translated anywhere, in a community of evidence and rational enquiry. Yet he only had to move on the mountains for a different mind to assert itself, stubbornly native and local, yet reaching beyond to a wider, common flow, where touch and breath replaced record and analysis: not narrative as history but stories as lives. (12)

This is a different kind of alternative to a linear history than that provided by Joyce's *Ulysses* or Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, though it shares some characteristics with them. Both *Ulysses* and *A Thousand Plateaus* tend towards the presentation of a multiplicitous

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<sup>17</sup> See Cavaliero (1995:133-157) for a fuller discussion of 'numinous landscapes' in English fiction.

present. In Joyce's novel, the events of a single day are dramatised in epic form but also refer us back into history. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, nomadism is presented as the opposite of a history, but dates are attached to each plateau. As in William's novel, generations are 'all suddenly present'. In each case, an itinerant or nomadic geography, a 'tour' in de Certeau's sense, is provided as a form of orientation. Each book portrays a form of wandering, motivated in different ways, that amounts to a cartographic alternative to the stable linear progression and development of less experimental novels. Williams's use of the term 'regions' avoids a straightforward opposition between the scholarly and the popular; there is a difference between kinds of memory but not necessarily a rift. The latter is 'stubbornly native and local' but connects to a wider world in a manner reminiscent of Olson's attempt to connect the local and the cosmic; contrasting 'stories as lives' with history is one way of contrasting mythology with history and one might recall Olson's desire to reunite 'muthos' and 'logos' in the writing of history. Both Olson's and Lefebvre's appeals to deeper forces, of which people are scarcely conscious, but which are part of a social and collective rather than individual psychology, are comparable with William's evocation of 'a wider common flow'.

The first framing narrative of the novel, where Williams's approach to place and history are set out in general terms has been afforded particular attention here. The approach to the remainder of the novel is inevitably more selective due to reasons of limited space but includes some attention

to each of the thirteen sequences and the majority of the forty stories of which the novel's two volumes are composed.

## **5.2 The Beginning : 23, 000 B.C. to 2,000 B.C.**

The first sequence, of two stories, set in 23, 000 B.C. and 16,000 B.C. respectively, leads back to the source of that 'wider common flow' referred to in the opening framing narrative. The opening story, *Marod, Gan and the Horse Hunt* begins as we wake, as readers, from Glyn's dream, which also functions as collective memory (in a fashion comparable to Olson's Jungian approach to history as collective memory), into Marod's waking and his world. That world, despite being a representation of life 25,000 years ago, is not presented as almost unimaginably different. The story portrays a brief period in the difficult life of a family group of hunters coping with the demands of their physical environment, their need to hunt for survival and to take care of the not fully healthy. Gan, like a number of significant figures in the novel, is crippled. The story describes how the group successfully manage to hunt and kill a horse but temporarily have to abandon Gan in order to do so. This results in his death from cold and ends the story on a sombre note after the triumphant conclusion to the hunt to which most of the story has been devoted. Seven thousand years and the return and subsequent retreat of the icefields of a glacial period separate the first story from the second, *Varan at the Edge of the Great Ice*. In this story Varan succeeds in locating the hunting grounds referred to in a story which other members of

his society regard as mere fantasy rather than a significant, practical element of their culture.

Both stories are concerned with the search for places in the form of hunting grounds. The first story is complicated by the need to take care of Gan, a need is presented as basic in the people portrayed. Much of the story is concerned with the details of family life - at this period the life of extended rather than nuclear families. We watch an early family-community survive, develop and negotiate both its internal, social relationships and its relations with the natural environment. In the second story we are already involved with the complexities of a transmitted verbal culture and its mythologies. As in Olson's work, these are shown as transmitting significant information about the movement of early human beings on the earth. Varan has to balance the verbal pictures provided by the tales with calculations of time and distance, deciding how to interpret tales and measure his physical relations to the world. These are early examples of themes to be developed over the subsequent twenty thousand year period covered by the rest of the novel. As with Lefebvre's epochal history of different spatial regimes, a picture of the slow evolution of people's relation to their environment and to one another is gradually built up.

The emphasis on a history of generations is a feature of most of Williams's novels, though the number of generations is usually limited to two or three



in the same family. This is a feature of many regional and gothic British novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but *People of the Black Mountains* extends this to an exceptional degree. The notion of an extended family is present from the very first story but is made to include the local community over endless generations. In each story we never deal with the same people, but they are full of similarities to earlier generations, so that we have a sense of repetition with variations, rather as in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. One might also compare D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, which covers the lives of three generations in the same area, and the way in which Williams extends this approach. The flow of generation upon generation that *People of the Black Mountains* evokes distinguishes it from the more obviously manageable field of a novel which takes place over a relatively limited time period. Pinkney's observations on Lawrence in this respect are positive. He sees Lawrence as pursuing the creative Expressionism of an early stage of Modernism in contrast to the more aridly analytical and increasingly dehistoricised tendencies of later developments. Similarly, in his comments on Williams's relation to Modernism he notes that ' (...) it was Expressionism that aesthetically formed Williams' (Pinkney 1989: 25). Pinkney perhaps tends to distinguish over-schematically between these different elements of Modernism for polemical purposes, but this does not disqualify the accuracy of the observation. The emphasis on slow, sometimes barely perceptible changes, as opposed to those which are dramatic but ultimately superficial, is an important part of Williams's criticism as well as his fiction, as titles such as *The Long Revolution* and the insistence on

balancing the perceptions of Paine and Burke in *Culture and Society* indicate. In ways comparable to the approaches of Lukacs and Lefebvre, Williams is as interested in deep structural changes which occur over long periods as in the details of surface observations. At the same time, this long revolutionary perspective might be compared to aspects of Bergson's conception of creative evolution, a fundamental influence on *A Thousand Plateaus*. It may be important in this respect to view Williams as complicating a more naturalistic view of place, common to many of the earlier writers referred to here, by imposing on it a more rigorously historical perspective as much as seeing him as a Marxist novelist whose universalising tendencies are complicated by loyalty to a particular area and a related attention to issues of place and locality.

The framing section of the second sequence finds Glyn pondering on the significance of developments in the earlier period and the traces that indicate them. Geological and climatic changes are covered first. We are reminded that both Marod's and Varan's people were shown temporarily inhabiting the same spot at a turn in the River Wye and that traces of their existence were left. The sequence's stories are set at approximately three thousand year intervals between 10,000 B.C and 5,400 B.C, roughly half that between the stories in the earlier sequence. The first, *The Summer Lake and the New Blood*, also deals with a hunt and with a crippled individual but the problem takes a different form. Pani, while wanting to produce a child by Varan, whose name echoes the main character of the previous story, is persuaded to conceive with the more elderly and

crippled Mirin when Varan and others are lost. It is a decision distasteful to all but seen as necessary for the continuation of the bloodline.

In the second story, *Cara, Daughter of Cara*, the continuity of generations is emphasised even in the title. Again, the story manages to produce a complex, painful situation out of what looks to be a straightforwardly promising one. In a seasonal wedding ceremony, Cara insists on going against the wishes of her elders in waiting to marry a slow and apparently unsuccessful individual, Ral, rather than someone more obviously promising. Like Gan and Mirin, at the beginning of their stories, Ral emerges as a wounded figure. The regular reproduction of life is complicated by the combination of Ral's character and Cara's insistence on remaining loyal to him. In both cases what provides the motivating power of the story is the unconventional and far from attractive nature of a decision. In this story, too, we are presented with the gathering of a multiplicity of tribes, rather than the story of a single group's experiences.

The third story, *Incar's Fire and Aron's Pig*, begins with one of the main characters Incar placing his hands on the layered sandstone, as in the invocation at the beginning of the novel. Incar is a strong, successful figure but like Cara displays interest in a less conventional individual, this time the sickly but perceptive Aron. Aron introduces the idea of rearing domesticated animals but the tribe and even Incar fail to see the value of his perceptions. The story does not end with a simple vindication of the role of creativity in social evolution but with an illustration of the slow,

difficult, contested process of acceptance it needs to endure in order to prove lasting. Again, this is characteristic of Williams's general approach to questions of social development.

The stories of the second sequence raise a number of points about the slow, painfully creative nature of social development but it can be asked whether in doing so they really contribute to a poetics and politics of place. One answer to this question is that Williams's novel presents a cumulative poetics and politics which builds up an increasingly complex and interactional as well as highly social conceptualisation of place. A significant role is played by the natural environment which we see the various communities and characters negotiate and this remains a relative constant, even as social factors become increasingly important. At this stage, physical-geographical elements are almost as significant as those which are socio-geographical but even in the first story the problem of caring for the weak is presented as almost as pressing as that of getting food and the success of Varan's search is as dependent on his interpretation of a verbally transmitted history or mythology as it is on his ability to read the physical environment. In the second sequence, place has already become significant in the way in which successive generations choose the same spots and in developments such as that initiated by characters like Aron. Rather than working back to the earliest beginnings of a region and its cultural identity, Williams begins there and builds up a dramatic representation of its various layers of identity.

The third sequence begins with Glyn's hands on the layered sandstone. He reflects on the nature and the slowness of change: ' (...) the true pace, always, was local and day by day (83)'. He also notes how the change of climate produced changes in attitude and culture, though over a period of a thousand years or more. On the one hand, the local people become more cautious, on the other, new people arrive from across the waters.

Questions of communication in culture have already emerged as being of significance in the stories. Varan uses the old stories and Incar tries but fails to understand the value of Incar's contribution. This is an aspect of Williams's approach compared earlier with that of Habermas. The element of communication and interaction between different social groups inhabiting the same area becomes increasingly significant in the third sequence with four stories, all dated 3400BC, providing an equivalent to Joyce's 'Wandering Rocks' episode in *Ulysses*, reminding us that what happens in one instance can be happening simultaneously, in slightly different forms, in numerous other lives and places. All of these different groups have found, or are looking for, a good place, but an element of Brechtian defamiliarisation is introduced by focusing on the way in which cultural elements familiar to one community (and to a late twentieth century reader) are presented as strange to another. In the first story Gord and Namila are fascinated by the practices of a herding culture. The next story presents the story of the people they have seen from their own side. The third story is then entitled *The Meeting of Hunters and Shepherds* and further explores the slow, uneven gaining of familiarity with the practices of a new, emergent culture. This culminates

in the fourth story with the union of Tarac and Lisa, not merely the union of two people, but of two cultures.

The changes dramatised in the stories illustrating this process of union are summarised in the framing narrative introducing the fourth sequence of stories, bringing us closer to a sense of fixed settlement based on the grazing requirements of the flock. A precise description of the remaining traces of these unions is also provided:

On the slopes of what they called, in their language, Curve river - which a later people called Guuy or Wye – there was a string of settlements: one above the valley where Incar had set his fire, near the source of the Little Mountain River; two close on the wide grass plateau beneath the bluff which the hunters call the High Buck...(117- 118)

and so on, providing a detailed geography which relates stories to real places in the manner of a tour, and comparable to the approach of both Olson and Sinclair in this respect. The use Varan makes of what he learns, in the second story of the first sequence, is partly reproduced as real places are invested with significance by means of stories. This is a didactic more than an exciting or entertaining process and it would be foolish to dismiss the problematic nature of Williams's dramatic modality in this respect. Williams makes concessions to accessibility, though in terms of the simplicity of his verbal style and lack of arcane referencing -

in contrast to both Olson and Sinclair. Part of the value of the novel lies in the cumulative connecting of different developments it gathers into a popular, as opposed to more technical, history of an area. A form of resistant orientation is provided in the face of tendencies to empty out and re-structure or simply isolate this or other regions.

The first story of the fourth sequence, set in 3,000 B.C., focuses on the building of a long house and its relation to beliefs in, and cultural practices centred around, the Celtic mother-earth goddess, Danu. Building and knowledge are presented as closely interconnected and the festival of midsummer is represented. The second story indicates how, five hundred years later, processes of hierarchy and organized labour bordering on slavery appear in 'the White Land' and the main characters begin to feel a sense of being inferior provincials.

This major change and the double-edged nature of cultural progress are treated further in what is perhaps the central story in the first volume of *People of the Black Mountains*, dated 2,000.B.C. The main character, Dal Mered, is another crippled man, though here the deformation is reduced to a limp caused by a twisted ankle. He has lived in the White Land but chosen to leave it and return to his homeland. The description of this process suggests the ambivalence of Williams's own attitude to the power-knowledge relations embodied in places like Cambridge, though the story does not represent a simple rejection of them. Dal Mered teaches the young Karan the secrets of measuring that he has learnt and this

process forms the main body of the story, as hunting and other practices do in earlier ones. One of its elements is a contrast between the older values of the Black Mountain people and those emerging from the White Land. Menvandir, the precise place from which Dal Mered has come, is presented as a 'fine' place, rarely a complimentary term in the novel. Dal Mered is keen to point out to Old Karan of Menvandir that '...its importance is not the place. Its importance is the idea.' (161).

The antagonistic approach to places conceived of in terms of ideas and systems rather than bodily experience is a major characteristic of Lefebvre's approach to relations between power, knowledge and social space. Here, the approach is more balanced and less polemical but Dal Mered's Menvandir, source of the old stone circles such as Stonehenge, emerges from the story as a place as threatening as it is impressive. This partly stems from Dal Mered's own distinction between 'measuring' and 'signs'. While he respects the integrity of the former as indicators of accuracy and truth, he presents the latter as a means of social exploitation for priests.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after, he comments on the transformation of the old 'laws of portage' exemplified in the previous story, *With Antlers to the Seariver*, into a rigidly organised system policed by guards; 'Guards and signs! This is not measuring.' (180). There is something here, as in the whole novel, of George Orwell's approach, notably in *Animal Farm*, of presenting the degeneration of a potentially positive socio-political process in terms of a semi-allegorical story. Williams's approach is,

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<sup>18</sup> He tells Karan that 'I will not give signs, for I am not a priest but a Measurer.' (Williams 1990:178)



though, one which remains in relative proximity to actual historical developments. It is not only the degeneration of Menvandir which is a problem since Dal Mered arguably brings some of it with him to the Black Mountains. At the same time, neither this tale nor any of the others in the novel is an example of dystopian fiction. What makes it valuable in terms of a poetics and politics of place is its complex and relatively open balancing of different perspectives on the nature and development of a particular area. It is, though, in this sequence, and particularly this story, that problems of relations between more powerful forms of social organisation and their tendency to dominate and displace their less powerful neighbours become a central issue. Menvandir is the first real central place or state to emerge in the novel and is presented at one stage as a symbol of modernity, as Dal Mered reflects:

It was a simple, well-ordered, well-provided settlement, the kind of safe, quiet place he seemed to remember from his boyhood, though he had often suspected that memory had softened and improved it. Yet it was so utterly different from the great Round House of the Company, with its elaborate furniture, its fine flat-base pottery, its woven and brightly-dyed clothes and its prepared and varied food. It was as if he had moved in eleven

days' walk from one time, one world to another. Yet it had been his own decision to leave the company and walk west. There had been a lifetime of interest in Menvandir, at the growing point of the world. He belonged to its modernity, and his mind could never slip back into these these old settled ways. Yet quite apart from more particular reasons, he had become old and tired in his body, and it was as if his very breathing seemed to crave the softer and sweeter air of that west in which he had been born.

(157-158)

This passage raises a number of problems in relation to questions of time, place and progress. Dal Mered is aware of the dangers of nostalgia and does not deny his attachment to modernity, progress and the advancement of knowledge but his body, partly, as he admits, because of its ageing, needs more nourishing than that of the hard intellectual element he values in Menvandir. Rather as in Lefebvre's analysis of space, the body is often aware of socio-spatial elements not available to the conscious mind. Both these worlds are valued and neither of them is presented as perfect, any more than Dal Mered or old Karan. The approach here can usefully be termed postmodern not only in its heterotopic holding of more than one world in one space but in its carefully qualified evaluation of the benefits of those elements of progress which occur in the area on which it focuses. Williams's narrative uses simple terms such as softness and sweetness but they are supported by a cumulative dramatisation of the shifting tensions and perspectives of disposition and feeling that constitute the complex

and historical force-field which is a place, rather than an empty or easily manipulable space.<sup>19</sup>

### **5.3. The Beginning: 1700 B.C. - 51 A.D.**

The second half of the novel leads towards the beginnings of Roman invasion and to a more accessibly recorded history of events in the British Isles as a whole. Issues of exploitation, of both people and the earth, are again raised, providing the novel with a double, social-ecological, vision. These issues are raised in relation to notions of disease, in its physical, mental and cultural forms. In the first story of the fifth sequence, Seril suffers at the hands of her stepmother and stepbrother, running from the culture of one community to another in the process. The behaviour of Kevil, the stepbrother, is presented as bordering on the pathological but is only the first example in a series which intensifies as the novel progresses. The other two stories indicate how the earth, as much as human beings, can provide violent disruptions to life and even more virulent forms of disease. The second story deals with the experience and interpretation of an earthquake, particularly on the part of Old Samela who is sceptical about what for her are sacrilegiously modern methods of taking metals from the body of the earth and who sees the earthquake as Danu's revenge for such violation. Carvor, the central character in the story, searches among a series of different interpretations for the meaning of what is happening, deciding to move in the direction indicated by the

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<sup>19</sup> The notion of the 'sweetness' of the area is one which is deployed at several stages in the novel as one to which various characters refer when defending it against what is

searches of Karan the Measurer towards a sacred place. Belief is portrayed as part of a search for orientation in relation to circumstances which cannot be accounted for easily. In this respect, the story again takes on a strongly contemporary feel in its presentation of a search for direction among a plethora of competing perspectives. The final story in the sequence presents a picture of the anthrax plague and its negative effects on the lives and cultural confidence of communities:

It was a disaster beyond anything which the shepherds could have imagined. For several generations, slowly remaking their lives as the surviving children matured, there was a loss of spirit and of belief, and this in its own way was as damaging as the direct destruction of the disease. (231-232)

A comparison can be made here between Williams's approach and that of Arran Gare. Both writers' treatments of questions of place and region are informed as much by ecological as by Marxist considerations and both are interested in pathologies which affect both people and the earth. One of the basic functions of culture is to organise social life in a sufficiently coherent fashion for communities to be able to maintain and develop a productive relationship with one another and the earth. Gare, in his earlier book, *Nihilism Incorporated*, provides a polemical account of the various ways in which Western cultures have increasingly failed to meet this challenge and how the cultural nihilism of the late twentieth century

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perceived as the intolerant impositions of outside influences.

might provide the possibility of a new beginning. Williams's approach is less apocalyptic but his long-historical scope offers a long term perspective on questions of cultural disorientation and decline, as well as possibilities for recovery.

Some of these developments are explored in the opening to the sixth sequence. Comparisons might be made with Gare and Lefebvre here, in terms of a Marxist preoccupation with divisions of labour, but also to poets such as Olson and, by extension, Prynne and Sinclair, in terms of the emphasis on feeling the presence of earlier generations in the landscape and wondering at the nature of the beliefs which provided them with an adequate sense of orientation. The introductory section traces the move from a sense of wonder and reverence to one of calculation and exploitation, a preoccupation of the thinking of Heidegger as well as Marxist thinkers and the poets mentioned. In the preceding framing section, 'Glyn to Elis 5', Williams shows himself sensitive to charges of naivety in indicating the virtues of the closely related concept of simplicity as Glyn ponders the significance of Skirrid, one of the highest peaks in the area:

He turned his eyes to the Skirrid; Ysgyryd Fawr, the Holy Mountain. It was strange how many legends had converged on that broken peak, Significant only in its its isolation. Unlike these complex ridges and valleys it declared itself clearly and simply: a condition perhaps of belief. (189)

There is no question here of either Glyn, or Williams, simply identifying with this position; neither the significance of belief nor of the mountain, or the relationship between the two, is excluded. One might draw a limited comparison between Williams's clear, simple style of writing in this novel and its relation to the sophisticated surface complexities of much contemporaneous fictional and theoretical writing, but what seems available is a suggestion rather than a dogmatic preference. The reflections are on processes of transition that contain both negative and positive elements. The move from generous, open enquiry and faith to organised exploitation is perhaps the most negative and telling in terms of what follows in the novel:

(...) to live for the new knowledge, to spend each day and night in the long search for its complexities, still depended, physically, on the common life of labour. The nourishment that sustained it would at first have been willingly given, because the observations still connected with everyday practice. Giving would become, within a faith, a reverent custom. Yet the ever larger monuments, the extending systems in stone, developed beyond the powers of simple communities or even neighbouring groups. At some point, through the generations, what had once been community became order and what once had been gift, tribute. (237)

The speculation here, in 'Glyn to Elis 6', follows a broadly Marxist line of approach in terms of its preoccupations with the transition from open community to an organised order of social exploitation and can be compared to Lefebvre and Habermas, but there is no question of any simple, dogmatic preference, only a speculation regarding the problematic nature of larger and more sophisticated systems of social and cultural organization. The stories dramatise this threat from such systems to the local communities of the region. The first, *Tami in Telim and Grain Valley*, opens with an evocation of the different kinds of settlements operating within the region and relations between them. The self-enclosed nature of Telim is contrasted with the open disposition of Grain Valley, the only settlement with which Telim has connections through trade rather than marriage. The negative aspects of Telim's lack of openness are quietly indicated and it is Grain Valley's openness which brings news of the increasing influence of metallurgy and the military developments connected to it. *Tami and the Devils*, provides a more graphic dramatisation of this threat and *Telim and the Lord Epodorix*, set some three hundred years later, gives a picture of the menacing nature of the new dispensation. The representative of the Lord Epodorix who visits Telim offers its inhabitants a 'peace' which includes protection from the superior fighting technology of marauding bands but also an increasing degree of subservient incorporation into a larger and more hierarchical system. Williams has Namat, Telim's representative, speak initially of 'Lordepodorix' (276) rather than Lord Epodorix, emphasising the lack of familiarity with a formal hierarchical system.

Developments are chronicled in a modality of relative, though not complete, neutrality. The impression given is of a very early instance of military, state and other large scale forms of domination. The development of military domination is traced in later stories but there is also a sense of the problematic influence of powerful systems on specific local areas. This is something dramatised in relation to the influence of international capital in the late twentieth century in William's earlier novel, *The Fight For Manod*. Capital and the state are shown to have a long and at least partially negative genealogy. Williams's approach might be seen as overlapping with that of Deleuze and Guattari, though they provide a more aggressive and schematic characterization of the state and a different notion of the significance of metallurgy and weapons in their characterisation of the war-machine. Williams accords a less positive valency to notions of movement and escape from large-scale systems, but this does not mean they are not present. The flow of history in the novel provides an alternative to the dehistoricising flows of capital and other systems which attempt to impose a 'peace' which is as threatening as war (Deleuze and Guattari's objection to the 'peace' of late twentieth century capitalist relations) and so does the reluctant, wary attitude of the local inhabitants of the area to anything new.<sup>20</sup> This partly accords with Williams's own sceptical attitude as a cultural theorist to any new, exciting, quick fix for current social difficulties whether it comes in the form of capital and advertising or radical revolutionary Marxism and

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<sup>20</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari (1988:466–467) for a discussion of the 'peace' of capitalism.



other, related ideologies. The local, native sense of people in the area is accorded respect (though not uncritical reverence) as an important part of a developing social and political order which supports the co-existence of different communities and is capable of providing justice for all of them.

At this stage, the emergence of a new system is recorded by Glyn in the seventh of the framing narratives:

It had been in a way the greatest of all changes, beyond the natural variations of climate and livelihood. The old life and local communities became part of a network: not the old social networks of beliefs and gifts and trade, but a new formal network of land and property. Land and families became property within a system quite beyond them.

(282-283)

There is no move here explicitly to condemn this change but there is a sense of dangerous disorientation communicated by the ambiguity of the final phrase: 'quite beyond them'. The characterisation of 'a new formal network of property' is reminiscent of the distinction made at the beginning of Williams's first novel, *Border Country*, between the distanced, anonymous, formal social relationships of the metropolis, London, and the easy, informal ways of treating people in the valley to which the main character returns. The section ends with a reference to the fact that Epodorix is one of the Pretani, the Britons, and that to most people the imposition or acceptance of the new order seemed no more

than 'a kind of common sense' (286). Here, the reading offered seems to hover between the neutral and the ironic. Williams has time for local common sense but not an unlimited or completely uncritical respect for its virtues. He provides a long history of what can be seen, from perspectives such as those of Gare, Deleuze and Guattari, and Lefebvre, as a partly pathological system of exploitation of both people and earth.

The seventh sequence explores and dramatises the nature of this new socio-political disposition of rule by military aristocracy. The first story begins with a summary of the change of condition of Telim's inhabitants:

Slowly, against their own customs, the people of Telim learned the actual meaning of lord, which they had at first taken simply as a name. It was now, they learned, a condition. What they had considered their own settlement was now a part, a resource, of their lord. (286)

There is a direct description here of the loss of control and ownership of place by its inhabitants, moving towards de Certeau's description of the tactics of people who have no 'proper' place. These changes are reflected in the development of Banavint, described in the first story, from one of a group of settlements with minimum military fortifications to an 'impressive place' with substantial defensive outworks, wall and gate.

The tensions and antagonism between these two different structures of feeling, to use Williams's own theoretical term, is dramatised especially powerfully in the second story of the sequence, *The Wise One and the Slave*. Here an accident, a literal slip, by a local girl considered a 'slave' causes a confrontation between the haughty Mation, a far from sympathetic characterisation of one of the newly emergent upper classes, and Derco, the girl's brother who is almost as short-tempered and aggressive as Mation. Like his sister, Derco is considered a slave, and therefore possessing no right to communicate his opinions freely. The confrontation between Derco and Mation is mediated by diplomats for each side, Lugon for the aristocracy, Karan for the local people. Lugon insists on upholding the law, Karan for an interpretation of it which will accord with 'the sweetness of the place'. This is a concept which holds no meaning for Lugon who asks 'What sweetness?' The response is 'Of our earth, wise one. Of our place in this earth. To shed blood would sour it.' (299). Lugon is unable to accept this notion of tolerant, earth-connected perspectivism and can only appeal to a higher power to which Karan must submit. The debate between these two intellectual representatives of the two cultures continues. Karan attempts to explain his culture's 'ties' to the earth, while rubbing a piece of sandstone between his fingers at one point.<sup>21</sup> Lugon responds to this with more angry assertions of his own culture's superiority. At the end of the story Derco escapes and Karan's life is taken in place of his. The story portrays and defends the beliefs and ways of an older, gentler culture, with close ties to the earth and to

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<sup>21</sup> 'Karan, unobserved, shifted a flake of sandstone from his left hand to his right. He rubbed it, now concealed, with his thumb'. (Williams 1990: 305)

notions of place, against the arrogant dominance of a newer, more aggressively powerful one. Parallels can be drawn with Carter's portrayal of relations between aboriginal natives and the modern colonisers of Australia. Telim is shown to be limited in its perspectives but figures like Karan present us with a powerful characterisation of its positive aspects. By this time we have reached 250 B.C and are close to the Roman invasion but the dating of these stories makes it clear that processes of domination and colonisation are not to be equated with any simple division between Roman and Celtic or pre-Celtic cultural characteristics. The great, crucial change, from an attached sense of place, to a dominating military system has taken place slowly, with intimations of what is to come from at least the time of Menvandir, and has matured into a mature system of oppression before the Romans arrive. This would seem to dissociate Williams from any simple identification with romantic notions of peripheral Celticism in opposition to the centralising, imperial tendencies of the Roman, and later the British, empire. This is not to say that he does not come closer to such a position in his treatment of later events, but it is to suggest that his treatment of earlier periods complicates any tendency to cast his perspective in terms of any simple, binary division between romantic Celticism and Roman imperialism. The final sequence of the novel focuses on early relations between the Romans and the native ruling classes. In the closing tale of the previous sequence, the enclosed, smug narcissism and squabbles of the court are complemented by a perspective which sees Julius Caesar and the Romans as being, like other slaves and distant foreigners, inferior. The eighth sequence's

framing narrative and stories provide a characterisation of multiplicity and strategic disarray among what are seen from a Roman perspective as 'Celtic' tribes and a later Derco emerges as a successful outlaw whose guerilla tactics are more effective against the Romans than the heroic notions of combat favoured by the dominant military aristocracies. The novel closes with Derco confidently concealing himself from both Roman and native, British enemies.

The first volume of *People of the Black Mountains* deals, as its last framing section notes, with a period of history for the most part unrecorded. Its major themes are those of the long-term development of an area in terms of its settlement and the different forms of cultural organization that shape it. This slow, cumulative development is complemented by a slightly more mystical appeal to the 'sweetness' of place, presented in various forms. Processes of interaction between peoples and, in the later stages, the domination of some by others, play a major role in an alternative history concerned as much with issues of justice, freedom and equality as with orientation and attachment to place.

## **Chapter Six : People of the Black Mountains 2: The Eggs**

### **of the Eagle**

The second volume of *People of the Black Mountains* takes the reader from the days of Roman occupation in the first century A.D. through to the time of the battle of Agincourt, a symbol of both English and British national pride, due in no small part to the dramatisation of the victory in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, to which Williams's novel makes oblique reference. One of the ways in which the second volume is distinguishable from the first is that it negotiates a history recorded and interpreted to a much greater degree than that covered in the first volume. Williams spends more time discussing and contesting versions of history in relation to the area and providing dramatisations which challenge more accepted and traditional perspectives. The novel takes its subtitle from a story itself concerned with a debate over the possible significance of a dream which is taken to symbolise the future course of history, indicating a greater focus on the significance of the history of an area as constructed narrative rather than objective fact.

The first sequence continues to explore the experience of life under slavery. De Certeau's characterisation of people operating on a territory or place they cannot regard as belonging to them is especially applicable to the second volume. The first story explores the experience of slavery of the hitherto aristocratic Berin. Berin's sudden

fall into slavery allows Williams to present the nature of servitude in a more emphatic fashion than hitherto:

There was now an endless waiting under orders and for orders, a low aching realisation that for the rest of his life he would be no more than an object, an available body for others to dispose (9).

Wrestling with this condition and finding ways to escape from or cope with it is a major feature of the second volume. Berin's experience includes observation of the Roman 'enclosure' in which he is held, the types and names of building and the way of life they embody : headquarters, barracks, granaries, stables and latrines - plus the routine nature of his work in a lead mine. The combined description of everyday activity and its interaction with elements of spatial organisation is reminiscent of Lefebvre's approach to space and his notion of spatial practice, as well as being suggestive of later, nineteenth and twentieth century, developments when mining and related industries would become the centre of a way of life. Many of the characteristics Lefebvre sees as typically Roman - the enclosed fortification, the move towards property as principle and 'the space of power' represented by the buildings of a violently appropriative military order - have already been presented by Williams as part of a longer process, going back to at least 2,000 B.C. Similarities can be observed between Lefebvre's characterisation of a significant point in the transition from ancient, absolute space to a more,

modern abstract space in the way that the Roman mine, and the society which organises its working, hints at developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Williams presents Berin as having become less fixed in his attitude to those who are deemed slaves as a result of his own experience, an attitude which distinguishes him from his father and an earlier generation.

Lefebvre focuses on the villa and its related socio-spatial practices as particularly significant in the later Roman era and it is in this kind of space that the two later stories of the first sequence are set. Lefebvre notes of the villa that:

(...) it was the concretization within agro-pastoral space of a codified law-bound spatial practice, namely private ownership of the land. The villa thus combined in a single unit of material production the general traits of Roman society (an order grounded in juridical principles), a refined – albeit not very creative, aesthetic taste and a search for the comforts of life.

(Lefebvre 1991: 252)

The second story, set over a hundred years later than the first, presents its principal character, Gwenliana, as quite at home in such surroundings. Like Berin in the mine, she finds it comparable to arriving in another world, but whereas Berin is simultaneously impressed by Roman efficiency and horrified by the curtailment of his freedom, Gwenliana is attracted by the ‘fine’ life of



the Roman villa and the possibility of marriage to a Roman legionary, an attitude encouraged by her father. Becoming Roman presents a more desirable alternative than remaining British and she has to be forcibly wrenched out of her position by Gwydir and the forces of local, native rebellion against a violently imposed and unjust social order. In the depiction of Gwenliana's attitude towards Roman culture, presented in the first part of the story, there is a hint of the state of enchantment characterised by Benjamin as typical of the consciousness of the consumer wandering among the commodified 'second nature' of commercial capitalism:

It had been like arriving in the other world: the big courtyard house, the orchard and the garden, the mosaic floors and piped water, the shops in the town. And the ancillulae were treated kindly: as children they were almost like pets. (21)

A different but related perspective to that of Berin is presented in this geography with the final comments indicating the limitations of ancient Roman suburbia for the native population. The negative aspects of this condition are more forcibly represented in the third story, set a further hundred years later. This focuses on an older servant, Bibra, who has a hideous facial disfiguration. Bibra's growing up and the problems she suffers develop in parallel with the more attractive socio-commercial development of Roman Britain, but the injustice of dealings with lower social classes causes a rebellious rupturing of an apparently stable situation and Bibra is killed in the panic. She is buried with a minimum of dignity.

Tony Pinkney notes the resemblance of Bibra's facial disfigurement to that of Bert in *Loyalties* and the relation of that figure to the face of Dorian's picture in Oscar Wilde's novel. Bibra's life and fate present the grotesque alternative face of an abundant commercial culture, a figure which again relates as much to conditions under contemporary capitalism as those under Roman imperialism. Roman culture is not dismissed as simply or solely exploitative by Williams's narrative, any more than modern capitalism is in his earlier novels, but the strain of the servitude embodied in such dispensations is expressed in novels like *Second Generation* and in Bibra's fate, from which, in contrast to the main characters of the first two stories, she has no obvious means of escape other than death.

The stories in the first sequence portray the development of a powerful and successful system of social relations but we are reminded that there is an outside to this enclosure. Two or more social groupings live in an uneasy relation because of the imposition of an unjust social order by which one kind of space dominates another, even if living inside the luxuries of the dominant space makes such injustice easy to forget by those who benefit from it. The challenges from the outside come from different social groupings, both the leaders of the Silures and the local 'slaves' of Menhebog. The novel is attentive to the urgency of both claims and to the success of developments on the inside, but the underlying concern, as with Benjamin, Lefebvre, and Deleuze and Guattari, is with how the apparent peace and prosperity of a successful regime can organise and mask

complex forms of social repression and oppression, and with the need to find a way out of such limitations.

*Glyn to Elis 9* also reflects on the relation of Roman to more recent developments, again using the concept of ‘modernity’ to make the connection, as Glyn reflects on the significance of the Grywne Fawr reservoir:

Empty hills. Empty valley. The penetration of modernity (...)  
The building of the dam was forced by the mining to the south.  
in that sense it was like the drive of the Roman project, piping  
resources from periphery to a centre. The self-described  
civilisation nwas incidental. (63)

This more directly antagonistic note towards the dominant culture is extended later in the section where the reader is told that those who mourned the waning of Roman power were ‘of a distinct class: the gentry and merchants of the cities’ and that ‘Less is heard from those who rejoiced in the departure of an occupying power.’ (64).

The second sequence, which moves into the post-Roman period and the arrival of the Saxons, is more directly concerned with questions of narrative and orientation. Both David Harvey and Arran Gare present cases for the need to develop a strong, if flexible, form of meta-narrative to challenge the fragmenting and nihilistic tendencies they perceive in

late twentieth century culture. *People of the Black Mountains* consists of a multiplicitous structure of interconnected stories, a feature it shares with Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and Sinclair's *Downriver*, but it also interweaves and critically juxtaposes various forms of narrative representation in relation to the events they cover. This is particularly the case in the title story, *The Eggs of the Eagle*, where the five kings of the area meet to discuss their interpretations of the vision of the bard, Mabon. The vision is first related by Mabon and then followed by discussion. A central element here is the multiplicity of aspects of the vision itself and of perspectives on it. The metafictional aspect of the novel is focused on by Pinkney who contrasts the responsibly historical element in Williams's approach with tendencies in both twentieth century fiction and theory to produce formally self-enclosed systems. These, he argues, tend to support rather than challenge the universalising tendencies of regimes keen to erase the injustices and violence, recorded in some histories, of the social order they promote. This view is a variation on a theme elaborated by both Lefebvre and Harvey. Pinkney seeks to explore ways in which Williams's novel combines the critical aspects of a metafictional approach that is sceptical of the ability of narratives to help people forget what needs to be remembered. A contributory factor here is the powerful mapping of time and space embodied in the combination of its unusually ambitious historical scope and geographical focus.

Pinkney's account might be supplemented by reference to Brecht and Benjamin as well as to modern Irish literature. Brecht's mode of defamiliarisation in presenting the spectator with a less emotive form of narrative was noted earlier. Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* (Benjamin 1992: 83-107) challenges the form of the novel as a conveyor of information to be passively consumed by the reader, in contrast to the story, which demands active interpretation. A connected observation appears in Declan Kiberd's approach to Joyce's writing and its relation to the growth of Irish national identity. Appropriating Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of minoritarian writing and lines of flight and aspects of Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1982), Kiberd suggests a predominantly political motivation for the exceptional inventiveness and iconoclasm of Joyce's writing in relation to the novel as a literary form.<sup>1</sup> What are, by comparison with *Ulysses*, limited forms of departure from the conventions of the modern novel in *People of the Black Mountains* might also partly be accounted for by political considerations. The epic aspect of Williams's novel indicates kinship with forms of modern epic poetry that support a more independent national or regional identity. Its relatively accessible, if austere didactic, style of writing indicates a solidarity with popular fiction in the service of critical, egalitarian objectives and a socialist politics. This is evident in Williams's willingness to experiment, in earlier novels, with forms of popular genre fiction. An open, relational form of Socialist nationalism or regionalism is an element common to the

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<sup>1</sup> See Kiberd (1996: 115 –129, 330-349)

approaches of Joyce, Gare and Williams, though this can involve a dangerous proximity to more dubious forms of political orientation. The problematic element of relations between reality and fiction in the interpretation of the past and future of an area continues in the second story in which the once and future king of T.H. White's earlier novel of that name, Arthur, appears as a far from straightforwardly admirable presence. The problem of disease as an aspect of the natural environment, suggested by the yellow mist in Mabon's dream, occurs in combination with a visit from representatives of the local warlords in search of tribute. Morudd, the chief representative tells tales of a variety of peoples, indicating the cultural multiplicity of this period. His comments end with an introduction to Arthur, but as the story progresses it becomes increasingly unclear whether Arthur is a reality or a myth to support the interests of the class fraction referred to in *Glyn to Elis 9*. In contrast to the popularising of old mythical forms represented by writers, such as Tolkien, who also employ an epic form, a sceptical approach is adopted towards the notion of Arthur as either historical or mythical figure. He is presented as little more than a form of propaganda for purposes of exploitation by the local warlords.

The production and interpretation of narratives in relation to historical events and processes is also present in the final story of the sequence where disease recurs. As in the previous story, details of local culture are included in the framework of the narrative. The appearance of the 'Yellow Death', which occurs at the time of the old Celtic, heathen festival of Samhain, sparks a debate between the newly Christianised

Nyr, a disciple of Gildas, the Christian historian, and the older, less fashionable beliefs of old Glesni. As in earlier stories there is an element which might be compared to both Brecht and Habermas in the way in which the story contrives to have issues presented almost as if in a court of law, so that the reader can judge for themselves, but at the same time the background and historical context of each speaker's predispositions is presented, as is the impression that we are dealing with a debate between positions of which one is new and increasingly dominant, universalising and relatively intolerant, while the other is in quiet decline and relatively local. Nyr wants to blame the disease on the sins of humanity but Glesni again appeals to the earth and notions of its sweetness, a position which finds him siding with Pelagius against Augustine. When Nyr suggests that Glesni is in danger of supporting paganism in the form of an image of Sulis, he is told that ' (...) that is a word of the Romani, to mean the country people. People like us of this land.' (92)

As with Lefebvre's approach to universalizing verbal discourses, physical relations to place are invoked as ultimately more meaningful by Williams's narrative. This is achieved not in any straightforwardly assertive fashion but through a competitive dialogue where the view supported is that of the relatively powerless local. Figures such as old Glesni and old Karan are comparable with Carter's evocation of the combination of a more tolerant attitude to strangers and a reverent attitude to the importance of the land. Williams's strategy of presenting confrontations between the insensitively

universalizing, (as with Carter's modern European colonisers) often violently paranoid tendencies of new cultural formations and those of older, gentler and more tolerant cultures also focuses on the question of justice and communication and the grounds, or the lack of them, for the successful fostering of either. These are preoccupations he shares with Carter, in terms of the latter's concern to look back in history for possible avenues of communication through the underrated attempts of sympathetic European immigrants, but also with Arran Gare in his attempt to provide the grounds for a multi-levelled approach to justice and communication for ecological reasons.

All of these elements are present in the opening story of the next sequence, *The Death of Clydawg*. *Glyn to Elis 10* prefaces this story with a review of incursions into the area by various Saxon leaders but insists, in its closing paragraph, on the significance of a deeper 'inscription' of identity which stems from a long relationship with the land rather than relatively temporary cultural orders:

Much of the history was disputed. Much of the topography was overlaid by late and arbitrary names. Yet a structure of feeling was still tangible : the body of a land and of a people. It was an invaded land and a mixed people, but it inscribed an identity, or offered to inscribe it. His immediate search for Elis came through as this inscription. (100)



The beginning of the paragraph finds Glyn touching a boundary stone. It is as if the older, Arnoldian notion of literary touchstones, the best of what has been thought and said, is replaced or deepened by a more local and literal appeal to that notion, where the grounding of an adequate cultural identity is one which takes place in relation to the earth, or a part of it. The 'mixed' and 'invaded' aspects of local inhabitants seem to be accepted, distancing the position taken from one of paranoid purification. Again the appeal is to touch and the body and to that which lies beneath the surface. All of these characteristics offer a poetics and politics of place comparable to that of Lefebvre in his insistence on something deeper than discourse and to de Certeau in his championing of a tactics of relative invisibility by the substantially dispossessed. On the other hand, there is also a stubborn insistence on the specificity of a particular region which connects Williams's approach more closely to that of Carter or Gare.

*The Death of Clydawg* portrays the effects of an early Saxon wave of invasion. As in some of the previous stories, the reader is reminded of the rarity of the phenomenon of invasion seen from the perspective of a single lifetime:

There had been no fighting in this valley through more than four lifetimes. The sudden invasion and devastation dislocated their peaceful sense of life. While they stayed on the mountain, they appealed to Olen Cyfarwyd, the storyteller, for stories that

would begin to make sense of these terrible events. But he was unable to offer them any. His preferred stories were of older times. (103).

The possibility of a comparison with the treasured and untroubled 'shire' of Tolkien's hobbits again arises here. There is, however, no question of a Merlin-like Gandalf or a great king coming to save the local inhabitants. Olen, the storyteller, is initially presented as an apparently impotent figure, but as the men of power appear and debate the precise nature of new territorial dispensations they again support their arguments with the various truths of multiple stories concerning the death of Prince Clydawg. It is Olen's story that closes the narrative and begins to indicate his power. Like other figures discussed, Olen quietly represents an older, less flamboyant culture, closely related to the earth and the local people, rather than the powerful ideologies of the military aristocracy and Christian church whose views occupy the central part of the story. Rather as in the closing paragraph of *Glyn to Elis 10*, we are thus presented with another instance of the gentle but stubbornly resolute survival of an older identity whose primary affiliations are to place in the form of land and locality.

The other stories in the sequence bear a closer resemblance to de Certeau's notions of tactics in relation to space and place. In the second story, 'The Gift of Acha', we are reminded that Britons as well as Saxons or Romans impose slavery. The story opens with an evocation of Acha's and her daughter's mixed cultural identities. Acha is a Saxon by origin and now a British slave, but her daughter, bilingual like her mother, only uses English when they are alone. Rather like Gwenliana in the earlier story, Hilda is eventually pushed into returning to her own people as her

mother makes deft use of the help she provides for a wounded Saxon soldier trapped in the area. The soldier uses the term 'Welsh' for the people of the area and reminds Acha of the considerable mixing between the two peoples that has taken place. While Acha is insistent on the physical aspects of her daughter's cultural identity, the main issue is the freedom from slavery that Hilda will gain. The close of the story relates the successful conclusion to Acha's secret tactics in terms of their apparent flouting of notions of cultural exclusivity:

She was never suspected of complicity in her daughter's disappearance, since it was obvious to everyone that she would never willingly have let her daughter leave her: she was a Saxon caeth and an alien, who had only her daughter, of her own blood to live for. (137)

Issues of cultural mixing and their relations to those of cultural domination and exploitation are prominent in this sequence. Notions of cultural hybridity have become increasingly accepted in the later twentieth century Western European context but cultural paranoia persists in terms of hostility to substantial ethnic minorities perceived as outsiders. Deleuze and Guattari's relative lack of oppositional hostility to capitalism due to their perception of the positive aspect of its socially liberating qualities is distinguishable from Heidegger's tendency to figure people and land in a tight cultural equation. In *Glyn to Elis 10* Williams's comments go some way to acceptance of cultural hybridity with questions of social justice and attachment to locality transcending more dogmatic notions of identity and

belief. Williams's long, developmental history has a degree of affinity with Deleuze and Guattari's Bergsonian approach to a cultural evolution determined by processes of 'double articulation'.<sup>2</sup> New forms emerge from contacts between different types; difference produces difference rather than, or prior to, the survival of the fittest. Williams's position in these stories perhaps lies between these perspectives. His interest is not so much in the survival of the fittest as in the continuity and development of the local and the just.<sup>3</sup> His presentation of forms of hybrid specificity coincides with some aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's more unrestrained support for elements of productive and combinatory difference at every level of creation. His connecting of a politics of place with one of social justice is closer to that of de Certeau in terms of the way in which the latter occasionally appeals to nature for examples of 'tactics' or 'metis'. At the same time, Williams can be regarded as supportive of a politics of difference, in an approach comparable to that of David Harvey, in that his stories indicate resistance to systems of thought and cultural practice which fail to take sufficient account of questions of cultural specificity, while holding on to a strong narrative of progressive social emancipation. Williams's novel does not support a politics or poetics which favours unlimited specificity. The mixing of identities presented in his stories is shown to be a long, slow and often very painful process that takes place over centuries rather than suddenly in significant moments, even though such moments may be taken as dramatically indicative of that process.

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<sup>2</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari 1988:40-45

<sup>3</sup> See Williams's essay on 'Social Darwinism' (Williams 1980: 96-102) for his own discussion of Spencer's and other subsequent interpretations of Darwin's original notion of natural selection.

The final story in the sequence provides another comparison of cultures. There is the culture of honour of the military aristocracy of the Welsh Britons, the more cunningly pragmatic culture of the latest wave of invaders, the Vikings, and a final, reluctant display of military effectiveness by Caran, the local shepherd, as, like Derco earlier, he operates in guerilla fashion, shooting arrows from the trees in order to protect his land and his people rather than notions of military honour and prowess. As with Deleuze and Guattari's war machine, Caran is forced into an effective mode of violence while pursuing a necessary line of flight. He is barely aware of what he is doing as he escapes as an outlaw on his own, native territory.

The thematics of this perspective are extended in *Glyn to Elis II*. The multiplicities and complexities of history are emphasized and 'the crowded history of unrecorded men and women' is preferred to 'the traditional resonant clash of unitary peoples' (159). Plurality and the ordinary are valued above powerful and glamorous individuals and 'unitary peoples' in a way which combines elements of Lefebvre's concern with a politics of everyday life and Deleuze and Guattari's with one of multiplicities. The eleventh sequence takes the area's history to eleven years before the Battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest. Recognisable historical figures appear in the first story, but only as fleeting presences. These include Welsh, Saxon, Viking and Norman troops and individuals such as Gruffydd ap Llwellyn and

Harold Godwinsson. The local people are presented as viewing these figures only as elements of devastation they must negotiate with and tactically aid or avoid in order to survive. Only minimal comments are made on such figures but it is in the second story, *Signs of a Vengeance*, set some eighty years later, that such figures are further discussed in another round of storytelling and interpretations of the significance of past events, real or imagined.

The first signs are those of the coincidence of the death of King Henry of England and heavy rains and flooding which are taken as a cue for rebellion in Wales. Iorwerth, a military commander, one of the main Welsh characters in the story, then discusses the question of the power and reliability of signs and tales with the other, Gwelchmai, his bard, a figure comparable to Olen in 'The Death of Clydawg'. Gwelchmai responds to the question as to whether where they are is 'a place for signs' by telling a tale in which Gruffydd ap Llewellyn demands reparation for an offence against him committed in a dream. Cynan, 'skilled above all others in the great laws of the Hywel Da' provides a judgement agreeing that reparation must be given at a rate of one hundred cattle for each cantref. However, as the offence was committed in a dream the king will be entitled only to the reflection of the cattle since 'a dream is but a reflection of the truth'.<sup>4</sup> Gwelchmai is canny and sceptical in his attitude to dreams, signs, tales, and other 'reflections of the truth' - an attitude generally supported by the

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<sup>4</sup> See Williams 1992 (b): 180-183

novel, and one which might be seen as combining elements of Lefebvre's preference for the truth of space over representations of space. Here Gwalchmai expresses his scepticism towards the arrogance of either discourses or individuals that claim any privileged access to the truth, particularly if combined with claims to power. This scepticism is further expressed at the end of the story when Iorwerth gloats over the body of a Norman lord he has killed and Gwelchmai is more concerned with saving the life of his young minstrel. The sequence ends with a further story of more savage devastation and vengeance, 'The Abergavenny Murders', describing the murderous actions of William de Braose, whose descendant appears as one of the main characters in Williams's previous novel, *Loyalties*.

The penultimate sequence of the novel begins with a sustained historiographical meditation on the work of the great medieval historians of the region and its context and significance, observing that '[Walter] Map himself and Gerald the Welshman, and, in a different way, Geoffrey of Monmouth belong in their essence to this bitterly fought frontier.' (227) The narrative presents a critical approach to aspects of the bardic tradition:

The poetry of the Welsh is honoured and long-standing. Yet in the wars of the independent kingdoms, against foreign invaders but also against each other, the verse of honour often becomes bombast.' (188)

The slow translation of older, complex myth into propagandising forms of history is also commented on, as in the example of Arthur in the *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi*: ‘ (...) the Artorius remembered in earlier Welsh reference as a tyrant and destroyer becomes, by mutation, the magical fighting hero. He will soon, to the world, be the King of Honour and Freedom.’ (230). Geoffrey of Monmouth’s fashioning of the story of Arthur is considered at some length and the narrative notes that: ‘Honour is absolute, with this small land as its centre. Yet, as the story is told the land is known as lost.’ The truth of space of the region, in Lefebvre’s terms, disappears in a verbal fantasy of honour which, as the narrative again notes, ends with ‘ (...) Arthur as the once and future King of an enclosing and dominant England.’ (231). The complexity and canniness, the ‘double vision’ (233) of Geraldus Cambriensis and Walter Map, with whose words *Glyn to Elis 11* opens are commented upon at equal length. The narrative notes that ‘ They are all writers of a border, who can move either way.’ (233), and just prior to this depicts them in a fashion which virtually coincides with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the nomad, territorialising on deterritorialization:

Gerald and Walter write a cool, observing prose, picked up in movement from place to place and story to retold story. Theirs is a detachment from attachments which are always newly perceived and negotiated. (233)



The attitude of Williams's narrative towards these historians is ambiguous, admiring of their skills but less so of their semi-detached attitude to the area, though even here they seem to be valued for instinctively reproducing the character of the time of the area in their own ambivalence and fabulatory elaborations. There is perhaps an element of identification with as well as criticism of such writers. Williams himself attempts to produce a substantially historical narrative, combining aspects of fact and fiction on a comparably epic scale.

Problems of philosophical orientation and the intellectual as locally implicated historian are further dramatised in the first story of the twelfth sequence, *The Monk's History*, set at about the time of the Battle of Evesham in 1265. Conan, the main protagonist, is, like Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Breton by birth. The principal narrative concerns his choice about whether to let his son Rhodri fight, on the side of Llwellyn ap Gruffydd and Simon de Montfort, in the coming campaign or to accede to his wife's desire to keep him away since he is not bound to fight. Conan allows the boy to go, on the principle that his son has the right to make his own choices in the way that way he himself did in leaving the church to take a wife, but he is deeply sceptical of the cause for which Rhodri is willing to risk his life. Rhodri is killed in the battle and Conan is left to reflect both on the nature of the times in which he lives and the burden of knowledge that he carries with him as an intellectual.

*The Monk's History* is the last in *People of the Black Mountains* with an intellectual, like those portrayed in both earlier stories and in all of Williams's earlier novels, at the centre of its narrative. One of the interesting aspects of *People of the Black Mountains* is how the large historical sweep of the novel allows Williams to provide a number of variations on comparable figures in this respect. Conan shares with figures like Dal Mered and old Karan a fascination with knowledge and a love of and loyalty to the place in which he is situated. Like the bard, Mabon, in 'The Eggs of the Eagle' he has a vision of sorts which he relates to his sons. Unlike Mabon's vision it is more specifically and actually geographical and historical. He begins by telling his sons that: 'I looked at these mountains, and they seemed like walls to protect a sweet holiness settled among them.' (248). The motif of sweetness again appears, but after providing specific details of what lay within his field of vision, Conan goes on to contrast it with the bloodbath in the plains beyond: 'Out there were the castles, the armed troops, the killings and the treacheries. Out there the unending struggle for power.' (248-249). His vision leads him to history: 'What we see, if we choose, from this height, is neither an order nor a vision, but something more compelling. We see a history.' (249) He then proceeds to provide a military history of the events which preceded the present campaign. At the same time, he might be seen as providing a justification of the novel's own form as a combination of poetic vision and political history. Conan's lofty vantage point, at the time of his vision, and at the beginning of the story, might remind one of that presented in relation to intellectual figures who collude with processes of gaining and maintaining power in de

Certeau's troubled examination of such problems in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. This is a feeling also present in Lefebvre's, Harvey's and Deleuze and Guattari's interpretations of relations between intellectuals and dominant power systems. Conan, while not physically disfigured, like most of his comparable predecessors in the novel, is mentally and emotionally tortured. Like Deleuze and Guattari's nomadic scientists he pursues a line of flight to escape the restrictions of a form of state institution, here the church. He thereby enters a less distanced world of touch and feeling in his decision to stay with Eirwen, his wife. This move is described in a way which connects notions of orientation with those of the body and its tactile and emotional feelings rather than its cognitive and visual aspects: 'It had been a slow redirection of his senses beyond himself where there had always been intensity, to a being so different, so apart, yet in the end so reachable, so touchable and so completing.' (243). The tension between the elevated, abstract and intellectual, on the one hand, and the grounded, everyday and emotional, on the other, is particularly strong in this story. It begins with Conan hearing a high, sharp call, that of Eirwen, which brings him down from the heights of a tower roof. The same call originally precipitates his leaving of the church for a more worldly and complete life with Eirwen. The relating of his vision to the boys is followed by a direct descent into the camp itself, where we are presented with the songs of the French minstrels and the figures of Llewellyn ap Gruffydd and Simon de Montfort. The story comes close to implying that his decision and its consequences, and perhaps earlier decisions and their consequences, have destroyed any remaining hope and his relationship with his wife. Only at the very last moment are

they allowed to embrace one another and renew the fullness of the connection celebrated earlier.

The remaining stories of this sequence, and those of the final sequence, chart an increasing tendency towards rebellion in the time surrounding the rise and fall of Owain Glyndwr. The final story provides an account of the last years and terrible death of John Oldcastle. Oldcastle is presented as a wanderer in the region, fleeing from persecution as a Lollard and explaining the motivations for his actions and beliefs. The story presents a slight but significant swerve from the famous encounter between Hal and Falstaff in Shakespeare's play. The new king does not simply dismiss Oldcastle but accuses him of heresy and has him sent to the Tower for 'examination'. (308-9). Oldcastle's prince is contrasted, a little later, with that of the Welsh prince, Glyndwr as Caradoc, Oldcastle's interlocutor in the story, observes that 'Our Prince is among his own people' (311). The story suggests both the beginnings of protestantism and socialism within the immediate region and further afield in terms of Oldcastle's connection with the Lollards. It also provides the novel with a final dissident figure, pursuing a Deleuzoguattarian line of flight and providing a radically different perspective on events from that provided by the currently most popular and influential dramatisation of them in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

A number of general points can be made in relation to *People of the Black Mountains* as a whole. It provides an alternative history and cultural mapping of a limited area. The nature of the alternative provided depends on the way in which the narrative centres itself in a specific region, outside the centre of dominance in the south-east. It focuses on the concerns of ordinary, unprivileged people, rather than exceptional and powerful figures, in a form which is dramatic and multiplicitous, mixing and challenging the boundaries between fact and fiction. The poetics and politics of Williams's multiplicitous narrative combine elements of ecological and socialist politics in their interrelating of issues pertaining to place and to social class. The novel depicts the development of an interaction between people and natural environment, on the one hand, and between different social groupings, on the other. The latter development indicates positive forms of mixing resulting from the interactions between different groups but also the steady development of technical skills which, while having positive aspects, also tend to provide the opportunity for forms of social exploitation. The sweetness of the place to which numerous figures attest is soured by both natural and human forms of threat to its well-being.

The modality of Williams's narrative is complex: 'not history as narrative, but stories as lives' is how the novel's own words express its relation to, but simultaneous swerving from, what it characterises as more conventional and collaborative forms of history writing. In this respect, it comes close to supporting Olson's distinction between a more

mythical, holistically pedagogical form of historiography represented by Herodotus, in contrast to the more technical and distanced version, 'logos', stripped of 'muthos', represented by Thucydides. As with Olson, poetics and science, the modern representatives of muthos and logos, are brought into a closer relation, as they are in many of the other theorists considered earlier, though perhaps most notably Deleuze and Guattari and Arran Gare. Williams presents us with a series of figures, from Glyn and Elis, through Dal Mered, Old Karan, Mabon, Olen, Conan and others, who, in different degrees and combinations, represent a passionately felt, as much as cognitively precise, relation to the place in which they are situated. The development of human knowledge and technical skill is not regarded in the light of a fall from grace from some sort of prelapsarian innocence but its combination with forms of exploitative power is always represented as a form of social pathology which sours the sweetness of the land. Figures such as Dal Mered and Conan are painfully divided in this respect, seeing the problem of their own complicity with the power side of knowledge.

As was observed, this is an approach which is also presented in most of the theorists discussed earlier and usually in connection with some form of close relation to a particular area or territory. Lefebvre and Harvey provide aggressive attacks on the complicity of intellectuals with exploitative power-systems, though they are also wary of essentialistic notions of place and identity. De Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari put more emphasis on the value of escape from and subversion of enclosing

systems. This is an element represented in various ways in Williams's novel. Gare and Carter, as well as Olson and Heidegger, like Williams, focus more fully on the virtues of place but also provide, particularly in the case of Olson and Carter, examples of intellectuals or artists who are capable of challenging and evading the negatively colonising elements of Western thinking and technology without recourse to a nostalgic or reactionary view of change and progress.

The negative aspect of exploitative, as opposed to mutually beneficial, forms of social relation, is represented by numerous figures, often those of great historical renown, in *People of the Black Mountains*. This is not to say that all 'outsiders', to use Relph's term again, are automatically treated negatively any more than all 'insiders' are treated as angels.

Multiplicity and the breaking down of 'unitary' notions is an integral aspect of the novel's approach, something it shares, to a certain extent with Deleuze and Guattari's search for a micropolitics of human behaviour. This characteristic is also present in the pluralised title of the novel, and in its long series of stories in contrast to more conventionally unified forms of both novel and history writing. The retrospective historicising of people into the unified concept of 'a people' is one that the novel consistently challenges and one which can be related to its relevance to the development of a poetics and politics of place with respect to areas which are smaller and less powerful than that of the nation-state. As was noted earlier, writers such as Neil Smith offer notions of a scaling of place, from the level of body to globe, and Arran

Gare's proposals for an ecologically sensitive regionalised global political order supported by narratives derived from a philosophy of process can be related to such notions. Williams's long, developmental history, which has been compared here to such philosophies, particularly in terms of comparisons with Bergson and Deleuze and Guattari, can be seen as a potentially significant contribution to a narrative poetic of this kind, one with a greater openness to the problem of popular accessibility than that of a more remorselessly arcane poet such as Olson.

At the same time, Williams's narrative, in terms of its considerably austere, didactic, often tragic and rarely light-hearted approach to the poetics and politics of place also opens itself to charges of inaccessibility. The positive side of this is the way in which it offers the possibility of a less obscure, but socially progressive rather than nostalgic or reactionary form of epic vision. However, one of the reasons for turning, in the next stage of this discussion, to a writer like Iain Sinclair, is to indicate some of the advantages, in an equally ambitious combination of 'muthos' and 'logos' with an alternative history of place, of presenting a more humorous and anarchic approach to comparable issues. This is not intended to suggest that Sinclair represents some form of advance on Williams's approach but rather that he indicates an alternative perspective which bears comparison with *People of the Black Mountains*.



## **Part Three**

## Chapter Seven : Place and the Early Writing of Iain Sinclair

Iain Sinclair, like Raymond Williams, has devoted much of his writing to a sustained investigation and dramatisation of issues pertaining to place.

The analysis of his work here includes consideration of its relation to aspects of French and American as well as British literary traditions.

Sinclair, born in Wales, is of Scottish extraction and was educated in both Ireland and England. The majority of his adult life has been spent in London, to which the bulk of his writing has been devoted.<sup>1</sup>

Like the area on which Williams focuses, London has the potential to disrupt any simple notion of national identity, partly because it is a city, as opposed to a country, a city which has interests that extend well beyond the British Isles and which houses a population of exceptional ethnic diversity. At the same time, due to the degree of that diversity, but also because of the size and density of its population, London is a community more obviously unknowable than Williams's region. Furthermore, Sinclair, unlike Williams, is not a native of the area he chooses to focus on, even if he has spent most of his working life there. The brief depictions of London by Williams in his fiction prior to *People of the Black Mountains* tend to depict it as an alienating and anonymous place.<sup>2</sup> This is far from being the case with

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<sup>1</sup> Sinclair's publications include : a series of volumes of prose and poetry, the most important of which are included in *Lud Heat & Suicide Bridge* , first published in 1974 and 1979 respectively; four novels: *White Chappell: Scarlet Tracings* (1988), *Downriver* (1991), *Radon Daughters* (1995) and *Landor's Tower* (2001)

<sup>2</sup> This is not meant to suggest that Williams is simply hostile to the culture and political potential of large cities, including London. See his interview with Philip Cooke on

Sinclair, but his novels regularly depict their characters discovering much about London of which they were hitherto unaware. It was observed earlier that Williams can be situated in the context of a predominantly English tradition in novel writing that includes George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence. This does not completely account for the nature of Williams's novel writing and his approach to questions of place, particularly in relation to Wales, but Sinclair's relation to aspects of national traditions in writing would seem to be more immediately complex and the approach taken here will attempt to reflect this.

In an essay on approaches to Paris in nineteenth and twentieth century French writing, Michael Sheringham distinguishes between two traditions. One is represented by Balzac and signifies for Sheringham what he characterises as positivistic types of writing that inform the reader about developments in modern urban society in ways more collaborative than critical. In contrast to this:

(...) the Baudelairean tradition construes Paris as a site of melancholy but ever-hopeful experience that questions and subverts the reductive characters of the planner, the politician and the orthodox literate. Paris becomes the name of a dimension of experience where totality is imminent but never actual, a zone of possibility for which the city-streets are the ever full, ever vacant setting. (Sheringham 1996:12)

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'Decentralism and the Politics of Place' (published in *Society and Space Volume 2* 1984 and reprinted in Williams 1989: 238-244)

This is a distinction partly reminiscent of Benjamin's between the modern novel and the story in *The Storyteller*, though in Sheringham's essay Benjamin is seen as part of the alternative to a tradition of writing collaboratively housed within, rather than reflectively critical of, processes of modern urban development. It is also reminiscent of Harvey's attack on the collaborative tendencies of post-modernist artists and theorists in relation to what he and Lefebvre view as processes of exploitative fragmentation, rather than tolerant and interactive differentiation. It might further be compared to Sinclair's approach to London, which like that of Baudelaire and later writers, projects personal dreams, fantasies and hopes (not only those of the narrator but of numerous other characters) onto particular places, investing them with an '*imaginaire*' (Sheringham 1996:114).

Sheringham's analysis includes consideration of a slightly earlier study by Christopher Prendergast which refers to both Williams and Benjamin:

Benjamin, like Williams (though in a very different style, insists on 'connection', the bringing to consciousness and knowledge of a system whose deep structures and modes of operation are often hidden, in the form both of an oppression and a suppression which suppresses the conditions of its own intelligibility (...) including, critically, the intelligibility of its oppressive character. (Prendergast 1992:214)

These comments also bring to mind perspectives such as those of Lefebvre, Harvey and Jameson. Their focus is on a more directly critical interpretation of modern, urban capitalism and the underlying, ultimately unsociable, processes it is seen as encouraging but both kinds of approaches suggest the possibility of a more positive whole, glimpsed beyond the fragmentations of a negative social space and the same might be observed of Sinclair.

Sinclair's investigation of obsessive relations to the earth is also reminiscent of another French writer connected with aspects of Surrealism, Georges Bataille. Nick Land, in his study of Bataille, provides a distinctively grotesque reading of Bataille's vision of the human condition under modern capitalism:

The human animal is the one through which terrestrial excess is haemorrhaged to zero, the animal destined to obliterate itself in history, and sacrifice its nature utterly to the solar storm. Capital breaks us down and reconstructs us, with increasing frequency, as it pursues its energetic fluctuation towards annihilation, driven to the liberation of the sun, whilst the object hurtles into the vaporization of proto-schizophrenic commodification. (Land 1992: 119)

Bataille's philosophy is one of joy unto death in a world where the tendency to self-destructive excess is characterised as positive, particularly in his late, epic work *The Accursed Share*.<sup>3</sup> It might be regarded as moving towards the grotesque and the absurd in its view of Stalinism as preferable to liberal capitalism by virtue of its joyful acceptance of mass sacrifice. Sinclair's interest in portraying characters locked into patterns of obsession, related to the earth and place, which only end in and often lead to their death, is perhaps comparable to Land's reading of Bataille, and of a grotesque approach to figuring meaning in opposition to the functionally manipulative nihilism of capitalist social relations. Approaches such as those of Bataille and Land, as well as Deleuze and Guattari, are Nietzschean in their celebration of life as an expenditure of energy and their attack on what they see as the functional nihilism of modern social relations and priorities. Sinclair might also be seen as eligible for inclusion in such a categorization. The depiction of such approaches as 'grotesque' here is intended to indicate a connection with what Isobel Armstrong sees as a means of characterizing much Victorian poetry in its indirect attacks on the injustices of social relations in Britain during the later part of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Her use of the term derives primarily from that employed by Ruskin in relation to Venetian architecture in *The Stones of Venice*, itself a classic study of the significance of place and of urban planning and architecture.<sup>5</sup> Grotesque, for both Armstrong and Ruskin implies an expression of social alienation and many of the more fantastic elements of Sinclair's writing might be

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<sup>3</sup> See Bataille (1988)

<sup>4</sup> See Armstrong (1996:236-241)

considered as expressions of this kind. Grotesque is a term closely connected in Ruskin to that of the gothic, his primary concern in *The Stones of Venice*. Attention has already been accorded to Pinkney's interest in gothic elements in the work of Williams and Lawrence and his connecting of these to other developments in aspects of cultural practice strongly connected with both socialism and sensitivity to locality, notably those associated with William Morris and the earlier years of the Bauhaus. Sinclair's use of gothic elements in his fiction is marked but also heavily ironical and characterised by allusion to earlier British and American literary texts.

One of the major influences on Baudelaire was an American, Edgar Allan Poe. Quotations from or allusions to the work of Poe and other American writers abound in Sinclair's writing. Much American literature includes a sense of discovering the culturally refreshing possibilities of life in a new place. This can mean founding a new way of life or renewing contact with older and healthier elements considered to have been lost during the development of European civilization. Elements of this approach can be observed in most of the American and Australian writers already considered or referred to here, most notably Olson, Carter and Gare, though elements of the same approach are perceptible in the work of Heidegger or Wordsworth in European contexts. All of these writers tend to evoke the notion of a predominantly rural and relatively beneficent earth. Sinclair's writing evinces a degree of sympathy to this approach in

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<sup>5</sup> See Armstrong (1996:514) for reference to Ruskin ( Works Vol. XI iii 154)

parts but it is usually expressed through a more immediately apparent relation to the more gothic element in American literature, as evinced in the work of writers such as Poe and Melville, both of whom also produced novels based on sea journeys. Journeys of discovery are a particularly significant aspect of Sinclair's work.

A further, closely connected preoccupation which connects Sinclair to aspects of gothic and American writing, and perhaps also to Deleuze and Guattari, is with flight from an enclosed, threatening place. Writing of this kind moves towards the depiction of place as hell, or at the very least dangerously confining, rather than as a new found heaven.<sup>6</sup> The haunted house and the threatening, enclosed space, are characterisations directly contrary to that of the sacred grove or *temenos*, but these also figure in the work of Sinclair and connect him to the concerns of Olson, Heidegger and Carter. Sinclair's texts, including those focused on here - his essay 'Nicholas Hawksmoor, His Churches' and his first two novels, *White Chappell: Scarlet Tracings* and *Downriver* - all present parts of London as complex and dangerous concentrations of energy rather than nurturing or idyllic forms of place but relations and distinctions between the two conceptualisations are far from straightforward.

Sinclair's adaptation of gothic elements applies as much to British as to American literature. De Quincey is appropriated and quoted in the essay on

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<sup>6</sup> See Knox-Shaw (1987) for a study of Defoe, Melville and Conrad as writers who dramatise the explorer in English fiction. Other writers, such as Rider Haggard, Arthur Machen or Samuel Butler, writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century period to which Sinclair's writing often alludes, might also be included here.



Hawksmoor. The first novel's concern with the Jack The Ripper murders involve consideration of writing by Stevenson and Conan Doyle. The notion of evil, or other dark mysterious forces, employed by these writers and others closely related to them, such as Oscar Wilde or Joseph Conrad - both of whom figure as influences acknowledged through allusion or direct quotation - is paramount in all the texts. Here one of Sinclair's main interests would seem to be in how culture breeds myth in relation to place, often through the medium of literary writers who are only partly in control of what is happening, as they create characters that take on a life of their own.

Sinclair's preoccupation with myth in relation to place connects his writing to aspects of twentieth century verse in both Britain and the United States. Olson is one of the most obvious examples but allusions to other modern poets with epic ambitions, regularly appear in Sinclair's writing, notably to W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, David Jones, Allen Ginsberg, and Sinclair's near contemporary, J.H. Prynne. These would appear to be indicative of an interest in the mythical and the arcane but also a complexly ironic attitude towards them. Like Prynne (elements of whose writing are related by Paul Carter to those of Australian aboriginal aesthetics) Sinclair adopts an oblique approach to the way in which writers like Olson treat questions of place. Prynne's poetry provides a more opaque, teasingly complex and relatively abstract textuality in contrast to Olson's direct treatment of the

geography and history of Gloucester.<sup>7</sup> Sinclair's notebook style of poetry is closer to Olson's in this respect, as is his focus on a specific place, but the divergent aspect of his relation to Olson comes in the form of an increasing use of ironical and satirical humour and the use of grotesque and fantastical tales and characters.<sup>8</sup> In this latter respect, Sinclair also indicates an affinity not only with the radical elements expressed by his use of gothic but also, in his more ironic and satirical use of such elements, particularly in *Downriver*, a tendency to emphasise the absurd. This is perhaps as comparable to eighteenth century approaches to the 'progress' represented by developments in an increasingly urban and commercial culture as it is to the work of the French writers already referred to, including the Situationists. One of the problems for the reader of Sinclair's work in this respect is perhaps to decide whether his writing should be interpreted as being primarily representative of an attempt to positively negotiate the elements of a perceptibly chaotic cosmos, or whether it should be taken, in novels like *Downriver*, as increasingly preoccupied, in potentially conservative fashion, with the superficiality of a dominant commercial culture, such as that particularly in evidence in the nineteen eighties. There is a shift to the more worldly terrain of the latter approach as Sinclair moves towards novel writing and wry observation of London's exceptional cultural diversity coupled with its equally exceptional degree of social and cultural pretentiousness.

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<sup>7</sup> See Prynne (1982) for the collected poems up to relatively recently and Reeve & Kerridge (1995) for an introductory study of Prynne's poetry. Prynne is perhaps the most influential of the British poets influenced by Olson's poetry.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase 'notebook style' is actually used by Sinclair himself in an essay on *Hawksmoor* to be discussed in the next section. The phrase seems appropriate to

The emphasis on the positive aspects of chaos connects Sinclair to writers such as Deleuze and Guattari, as well as the disruptive tactics of the Situationist International and Guy Debord, whose notion of 'psycho-geography' is particularly significant to Sinclair's whole project.<sup>9</sup> Chris Jenks identifies three 'central concepts' in relation to Debord's 'psycho-geography': the *derive*, the *detournement* and the 'spectacle'. The *derive*, or drifting, indicates the choice of an intuitive alternative route taken through the city and is comparable to the movements in haptic space of Deleuze and Guattari's nomad. The *detournement* is a re-positioning of elements into a new form of relationship, reminiscent of effects of collage and juxtaposition in avant-garde art from the earlier part of the century. The 'spectacle' takes us back to the conceptualisation of the dominant, distanced, visual culture emphasized by all of the writers considered in Chapter Three, as well as Foucault, in the wake of Debord's characterisation.<sup>10</sup> Elements of Debord's approach are particularly evident in *Downriver*, but the emphasis on more satirical and ironic elements might also be seen as linking him to a native tradition stretching from Pope and Swift through to Thackeray and Dickens and beyond.

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describe that of writers such as Olson and Sinclair who produce what amounts to a series of notes on their researches and related speculative thinking.

<sup>9</sup> See Bracken (1997) for an account of the origin of the term and of Debord's life and relation to the Situationist International. Plant (1992) also provides a discussion of the relation between Situationism and subsequent French post-structuralist and post-modernist theory.

<sup>10</sup> See Jenks (1995:153-156) for an interpretation of Debord's terms of which the above is a summary

Many of these writers were themselves based in London and before moving to a discussion of particular texts by Sinclair, some preliminary consideration of relations between London and literature would seem to be of relevance to subsequent analysis. Sinclair's London is primarily that of the later part of the twentieth century, a time of both decline and success for London, typified by the Thatcher years, beginning with riots but progressing to the creation of Docklands and a renewed sense of Disraeli's two nations, the rich and the poor, living in exceptionally close proximity. It is these aspects of development in late twentieth century London which have provided a focal point for many of the fictional studies of London. There is arguably a tradition in British fiction of portraying London as a city of extraordinary size and complexity, but also one where the extremes of riches and poverty seem to co-exist in dramatic proximity. The most dramatic representations in this respect are perhaps those provided by Dickens but one can also turn to the poetry of Blake for a sense of the city as a hell which could become the site of a new heaven, or Defoe's depictions of London in the throes of plague. As noted earlier, Stevenson and Conan Doyle both use London as the scene for battles between good and evil, with various forms of social implication.<sup>11</sup>

Another powerful wave of London writing was provided by the presence of new immigrants to Britain in the period after 1945 resulting in novels

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<sup>11</sup> See Mighall (1999) for a discussion of the geographical significance of late nineteenth century gothic fiction. Punter (1980) provides a more general survey and discussion of manifestations of gothic from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day.

such as those by Sam Selvon and Buchi Emecheta, as well as Colin MacInnes.<sup>12</sup> These can be seen to have provided the first stage in a process continued by writers like Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Timothy Mo and numerous others who focus on the experience of London's varied ethnic communities.<sup>13</sup> While Sinclair's fiction is often based in areas, such as Hackney, which have a reputation for high levels of poverty and large numbers of residents belonging to ethnic minorities who are relatively recent immigrants to Britain, his main concerns as a writer are not directly with issues of poverty, ethnic tensions or direct instances of social injustice. The primary aim appears to be to provide a particular kind of mapping of a city which is an enormous, powerful and often virulently dangerous field of energies, social and otherwise.

Sinclair's example has been followed or paralleled by other novelists, most notably Peter Ackroyd and Michael Moorcock, though a number of other novels, by writers who do not focus specifically on London, might be considered as falling into the same category.<sup>14</sup>

Ken Worpole, in an article on London fiction makes an interesting distinction between novels that merely use London as a backdrop and those in which the city is '...an essential metaphor and dominating metaphor throughout.' (Worpole 1995:183). Worpole is more impressed by aspects of popular detective fiction and Moorcock's *Mother London* (1989) than what he sees as the dubious obsessions of writers like Ackroyd

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<sup>12</sup> See Selvon (1988/1956), Emecheta (1994/1972) and MacInnes(1980/1959) for representative examples (the second date is that of first publication)

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Kureishi (1990), Mo (1981) and Rushdie (1988).

and Sinclair with macabre phenomena such as the Jack the Ripper murders, but this is to focus on only a very limited aspect of Sinclair's, (or for that matter Ackroyd's) approach to the city.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, both his commendation of Moorcock's novel and his interest in the regional potential of the detective novel are worthy of further critical development. Novels like Moorcock's *Mother London* provide a particularly interesting combination of a sophisticated mode of narrative relating aspects of popular culture to a broader and more complex social and cultural context but with respect to a socio-geographical area which is more specific than that of the nation as a whole. The same might be said of Ackroyd and Sinclair and, in relation to a different area, Raymond Williams.

Sinclair's writing places its reader at the centre of developments in British culture, both past and present, though this does not mean that his work attempts to vindicate dominant aspects of the national culture. His approach to place is very different from that of Williams and includes elements which can be compared to, and are often taken from, aspects of American and French as well as British writing. His approach is more self-consciously arcane, ironic and satirical than that of Williams but indicates a complex and respectful, though far from reverent relationship to the work of other poets who have a deep interest in issues pertaining to place and its relations. In these respects, his own work, like that of Williams, can

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Ackroyd (1995, 1993a, 1985), Moorcock (1989), Lively (1995), Nicholson (1997)

<sup>15</sup> Ackroyd is author of numerous publications relating to London, but *Dan Leno and the Golem of Limehouse Street* (1995) specifically focuses on the period of the Ripper murders.

be regarded as a form of project directly comparable to the theory and poetry already considered.

### 7.1 Early writing

One of Sinclair's earliest published prose pieces is entitled 'Hungry Ghost' (Sinclair 1989:13-14). In this, the narrator and his wife or girlfriend chance upon a situation which it soon becomes clear is that of an attempted suicide. Observation is made of the man's physical condition and the actions of other people involved, including the narrator, who uses his handkerchief to tie up one of the man's bleeding wrists. Eventually an ambulance arrives and the man is taken to hospital.

A number of observations can be made in relation to this short passage. Firstly, it begins with the words 'The end of a short walk'. Walking, it has been observed, is a significant aspect of Sinclair's approach to place, though more often than not the walk is not solitary but a collaborative, sociable enterprise. Here, the narrator has a companion. The 'end' of the walk clearly refers to its termination and yet, given what follows 'end' as *telos* seems almost as appropriate an interpretation as that of *terminus*. The apocalyptic element in Sinclair's fiction becomes more self-conscious as his writing progresses but even here the narrator is 'uneasy' with the nature of the place, in contrast to his companion. The precise name of the street is given and accompanied by a parenthetical characterisation which suggests a connection to earlier times: 'Holly Street (work ditch)'. This is

a very different kind of introduction to the chosen area from that provided by Williams. Williams's tends to be presented as rugged and difficult but sociable beneath its harsh surface. The place presented here is more eerily impersonal. Despite probably returning home, the narrator and his companion give little impression of familiarity with their surroundings. What follows is even more disorientating and disconcerting:

A man the far side of Middleton Road stumbled, held himself upright, then had the legs go from under him, drunk, tipped onto the pavement. We hesitated. He did not have the drunk's magical balance, the illusion of being on a wire, an animated earth puppet. When he fell I crossed to take a closer look. There was a dark tellis of blood running down one side of his face. (13)

The allusion to the figure of the drunk as an 'animated earth puppet' is one which appears with numerous variations in Sinclair's work, particularly *Downriver*, which presents a series of characters obsessively tied to a particular place. Also present here is something equally evident in much of Sinclair's later work - the thinness of the line drawn between comedy and horror. The man described is an attempted suicide and yet, a little further on, the narrator cannot resist using the potentially facetious, if accurate 'tellis' to denote the blood on the man's face. This combination of minimalistic documentary with occasional, more whimsical notes appears again at the very end of the passage where the narrator observes: 'There were spots of blood on my feet, which were in sandals, the right one blue,



the left one green.' (14). This is complemented by a slightly earlier observation: 'A younger woman, pretty, bent over to look at Denis's smashed face, yellow pants showing as her tight red dress lifted.' (13). Sinclair, while not known as a painter, studied at film school in London and is known as a film as well as poetry critic and reviewer, as well as working with poets who are also painters, sculptors or film-makers.<sup>16</sup> There is something complexly and perversely whimsical and detached about the attention to elements of colour here. Red, yellow, green and blue all appear, as does the moment of sexuality in an otherwise distressingly negative and depressing scene. It is as if the writer were painting a picture of something he cannot claim to understand, almost as if he were in a state of shock and unable to map the elements of the event into a cognitively manageable whole. On one level, this is perfectly understandable. Nothing is more natural than a certain degree of shock in such circumstances. However, the attention to colour and the other elements noted might also be seen as suggestive of a determined bohemianism and of a desire to both look unflinchingly at the horror the situation offers and to search for elements of beauty within it. Such an approach to the city might be likened to that of Baudelaire and later poets in the French tradition as well as to elements of Oscar Wilde's writing. Wilde is one of the many *fin-de-siecle* figures quoted in Sinclair's work and one particularly associated not only with notions of gothic but of decadence and bohemianism, both significant elements in Sinclair's presentation of London.

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<sup>16</sup> See Sinclair (1997) for discussion of his film-making and other careers.

A better known piece and one which is very different in style and approach is 'Nicholas Hawksmoor, His Churches', originally published in 1975.<sup>17</sup> This takes the form of an essay rather than a piece of diary observation and is more self-consciously rhetorical in its approach. Beginning with prefatory quotations from de Quincey and Yeats, the essay focuses on mapping a field of energy charted by eight churches in the east of London constructed under Hawksmoor's architectural supervision. Mapping and building are seen as ordering forms of cultural protection against the chaos, darkness and mystery which lie beyond their bounds:

Moving now on an eastern arc the churches of Nicholas  
Hawksmoor soon invade the consciousness, the charting instinct.  
Eight churches give us the enclosure, the shape of the fear; built  
for early century optimism, erected over a fen of undisclosed  
horrors, white stones laid upon the mud and dust. In this air  
certain hungers were set up that have yet to be pacified.

(Sinclair 1995:13)

'The charting instinct', the need for orientation, is evoked here as basic. The 'enclosure' presented is one motivated by 'fear', but of what is not made immediately clear. Obvious candidates are disease and disorder, in social as well as physical forms, and in this respect, the figure of Hawksmoor resembles a later figure of modernisation in its urban context, Baron Haussmann. More obviously comparable might be Sir Christopher Wren,

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<sup>17</sup> See Sinclair 1995(a).

who in Peter Ackroyd's novel, *Hawksmoor*, is presented as the figure of optimism and modernity in contrast to the devil-worshipping character based on Hawksmoor.<sup>18</sup> As was noted earlier, this fear of the beyond is translated by Jameson, with the help of the related gothic notion of the sublime, into a contemporary form of disorientation, that of the flows of modern capital and its related hyperspace. The point here is not that Hawksmoor's and Jameson's fears are identical but that their mode of presentation, in terms of spatial anxiety, is comparable. Hawksmoor takes on the role of town planner as gothic hero, a Frankenstein whose monster is the city: 'He had that frenzy, the Coleridge notebook speed, to rewrite the city: man, recognising some distillation of his most private urges in the historical present, is suddenly, and more than anybody around him, *there...*' (14). The 'Coleridge notebook speed' suggests the modality of both Sinclair's and Olson's poetry and prose. Hawksmoor, as gothic hero, is a man possessed, but Sinclair's use of him is reminiscent of the way in which Olson uses Maximus as a figure of projection. The emphasis of the man being '*there*' perhaps evokes Heidegger's sense of the 'Da' in Dasein; 'Being' involves being somewhere, in a place, but that place can be anything but reassuring, as the significance of anxiety in both Heidegger and Olson's work indicates.<sup>19</sup>

More than in Heidegger or even Olson, the battle is that of the town planner fighting the forces of chaos in the ordered form of the city, succeeding where

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<sup>18</sup> *Hawksmoor* (1985), Ackroyd's first commercially successful novel was, as he acknowledges, inspired by Sinclair's essay.

others have failed to take the opportunity. Hawksmoor's own words are quoted and italicised. Referring to London and its planners, in a letter to Dr George Clarke, he writes that: '(...) *they ought for ye Publick good to have Guided it into a Regular & commodious form, & not have suffered it to run into an ugly inconvenient self destroying unweildly Monster.*' (14) Sinclair then projects onto, or reads into, the positioning of the eight churches, a 'geometry of opposition', a phrase redolent of Blake:

A triangle is formed between Christ Church, St George-in-the-East, and St Anne, Limehouse. These are centres of power for those territories; sentinel, sphinx-form, slack dynamos as the culture they supported goes into retreat. The power remains latent, the frustration mounts on a current of animal magnetism, and victims are still claimed. (15)

As in Olson, elements of actual history are channelled into a poetic vision of redemption, but aspects of gothic sensationalism are also included; we are introduced to the psycho-geography of a culture and a place which is going '...into retreat' - one way of describing the decline of British as a world power. Processes of decline and the appearance of occult forces are themes dear to gothic fiction, but in Sinclair they are presented as a form of documentary in which the ghosts are those of actual, historical figures:

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<sup>19</sup> Again Olson's poem *The Librarian*, (in Olson 1970) which Olson saw as leading to the project of *The Maximus Poems*, is a poem dramatically steeped in anxiety and

So many spectres operate along these fringes: Yeats in the British Museum, at the time of the Ripper murders, researching into Blake (Blake and Newton, polar opposites). Milton: his early-morning walks over the ground where St George was to be built. (15)

The approach here might be characterised as a form of gothic, literary Situationism by means of which particular areas are invested with an occult history that makes them significant, awkward, unregenerate places rather than quietly domesticated and relatively empty spaces which are more prone to ‘development’ in every sense. Milton, Blake, Yeats and others are enlisted in a line of history which later includes Defoe, Bunyan, alcoholic vagrants from the time of Hogarth’s ‘Gin Lane’ to the present day, the narrator-author himself - ‘My own jobs follow the churches across the city’(20) – and a series of what are characterised as forms of ‘ritual slaying’, from the Ratcliffe Highway murders through the Ripper killings to ‘the battering to death of Mr Abraham Cohen, summer 1974, on Cannon Street Road.’ (21).

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre has some interesting comments on the development of gothic as medieval architecture, noting its ability to achieve freedom from ‘cryptic space’ (Lefebvre 1991:256) and its adherence to the power of darker, older forces hidden from both light and sight. The gothic signals the dominance of a new regime of luminous, visible, space. This ultimately leads, Lefebvre claims, to the subordination of space to the written word and the society of the spectacle. Lefebvre makes reference to the work of both Bataille (257) and

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paranoia.

Debord (261), at this stage in his argument, even though his main debate is with Panofsky's reading of medieval Gothic architecture (260).<sup>20</sup> A little later, he characterises this medieval, luminous space as leading to the future, secular, 'space of accumulation'. (263) At the same time he notes that:

With the dimming of the 'world' of shadows, the terror it exercised lessened accordingly. It did not, however, disappear. Rather it was transformed into 'heterotopical' places, places of sorcery and madness, places inhabited by demonic forces – places which were fascinating but tabooed. Later, much later, artists would rediscover this ferment of accursed and sacred. At the time when it held sway, however, no one could represent this 'world'; it was simply there. Space was ridden with hidden powers, more often malign than well-disposed. Each such place had a name, and each denomination also referred to the relevant occult power: *numen-nomen* (263)

Like much gothic literature from the eighteenth century onwards, Sinclair's writing works with such notions to challenge the dominance of a space of organised accumulation. The essay moves from consideration of the elements already covered, including serial killings as ritual slayings, to observations and reflections on earlier cultural tendencies, including those of the Romans and the Egyptians and their connections, actual and possible, to older cultures situated in the British Isles. This includes the Maya, whose culture figures as a major source of inspiration for an

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<sup>20</sup> See notes on pages 257, 260 and 261 with respect to Bataille, Panofsky and Debord respectively. Bracken (1997) includes a discussion of Lefebvre's relations with the S.I.

alternative culture in Olson's poetry. Various places are named and invested with ancient and subversive significance, in the manner of the 'numen-nomen' referred to by Lefebvre. The essay progresses from a discussion of de Quincey's treatment of the Ratcliffe Highway murders in *On Murder Considered As One of the Fine Arts*, where Sinclair suggests that while his treatment '...did not grow from direct observation of the ground.'(23) thereby missing the ritual element in the murder, de Quincey : ' (...) couldn't help getting in among the authentic substrata. Unconsciously he offers hieroglyphs, disguised and smudged Egyptian ritual detail.' (23). This Sinclair offers in much greater detail in relation to various places in the area, providing evidence of sun and fire-worship in a manner reminiscent of both Bataille's thesis of total expenditure and sacrifice in opposition to a contemporary culture of accumulation, but in a more playful and mannered fashion, reminiscent of the beginnings of British gothic literature and writers such as Walpole. The element of playfulness combined with consideration of alternatives to the 'space of accumulation' can be compared to the kinds of strategy offered by Debord and the Situationists and the subsequent writing of de Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari, all of whom are interested in the subversive potential of less visible forms of space and related practices.

Sinclair's essay on Hawksmoor is the first of many prose pieces included in *Lud Heat and Suicide Bridge*. The most significant of these in relation to questions of place is perhaps 'Intimate Associations: Myth and Place', which occupies the same, introductory position in *Suicide Bridge* as the essay on Hawksmoor does in *Lud Heat*. In contrast to the earlier essay, this one does not focus on a particular area but discusses human relations to place in terms of a general

relationship with the earth, of which myth is a significant part. Paul Carter's portrayals of aboriginal Australian culture and aesthetics and Olson's primarily positive presentation of myth tend toward the notion of something older and in many ways more positive, to be started from again and taken in a more fruitful direction. The same might be claimed of Heidegger's philosophy. Sinclair's approach, in relative contrast, focuses on and begins with the claim that 'myths are lies', an approach which again connects him to notions of decadence, to figures such as Wilde, and - in his focus on the relationship of place and myth to man's tendencies to obsessive, pathological, self-destruction - the gothic. References to Poe, 'prophet seer of American guilt' (148), and allusions to Melville emphasise the American connection. Myth is also presented as a form of cultural subversion: 'Myth emerges as a weapon, a tool of resistance. It emerges in the hands of men wanting to maintain a contact with the previous, the era of power & high function.' (148) The relation of this aspect of aboriginal attitudes to colonising powers is touched upon, but the notions of subversion and resistance suggest an approach closer to that of de Certeau or Deleuze and Guattari. There is also a suggestion in the passage quoted above that such uses of myth can be as reactionary as they are subversive. This element is extended into the claim that myth can be a lethal form of nostalgia:

It lies on the tongue like a grub. It climbs out of the book into a vertical energy called: FASCISM. The need for the old myths is a confession of our failure to handle the world, to be on terms with the life-spill of this moment. We want back to what was never there. Immediate parentage is denied. Deeper & deeper into the sand. (149)



In connection with relations between place and psyche, Freud is brought into Sinclair's discussion at the beginning of the piece by way of inclusion in a prefatory quotation from Robert Duncan emphasising the tendency of the unconscious towards processes of deception.<sup>21</sup> Both Lefebvre and Deleuze and Guattari look for ways of challenging this predicament, it can be recalled. Lefebvre contrasts the 'truth of space' with verbal 'representations of space', Deleuze and Guattari offer the openness of nomadic movement and thinking in opposition to the organised, sedentary repressions of the State. Olson, in his poetry, opts for a more Jungian notion of self which can only be achieved through renunciation of more egotistical notions and of an alienated relationship with the land, an approach also essentially followed, though with different cultural references, by Carter and Gare. Sinclair seems to occupy a position somewhere between these Freudian or post-Freudian, and Jungian or ecological stances. He lays considerable stress on culture as pathology, a stance which can also be associated with Nietzsche and post-Nietzschean thinking, or with much other late nineteenth century thought, as indicated in the discussion of the gothic and decadent elements of Sinclair's writing. The emphasis on travel or quest as escape is presented firstly in a negative and then a partially more positive light, in terms which resemble those of Deleuze and Guattari's opposition between the static and the nomadic or closed and open, or Olson's two

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<sup>21</sup> 'Plagiarism, fraud, perversion by pun, by reversal of values, & displacement of content, of above into below, of male into female, left into right, before into after – all these Freud saw as operations of the unconscious.' Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book* (Sinclair 1989(a): 146)

versions of America (its actual condition and the alternative history he proposes):

Where there is unclaimed space, unwritten land, there is the quest  
& there is mining, a sickly clawing, not only for minerals, crops,  
dead artefacts, but also for mythologies.... What we walk is  
myth flattened into space. Its hide. (150)

The alternative is characterised in opposition to both the 'celibate, fasting  
life' and 'the life of the materialist, forced to the service of his own  
goods, over stimulated into toxic inertia.' (151) This takes the form of a  
reconnection with 'the migrant, the traveller of paths, in balance with  
natural forces' (151). This type is seen as one for whom:

Place does not go sour in his pocket or wither his sinew. He  
has escaped the fattening & over-informed vortex of centre where  
the city dweller, unravelled by centrifugal motions, has fallen  
victim to a weight, an ever-increasing density of myth (...)

The city swivels on its axis, the sky is buried alive, buildings  
grow into the clouds, we carry the pains of architectural ambition  
on our shoulders. (151-2)

The relation of this characterisation to that of Williams's 'sweetness'  
of place is worth remarking on, though the terms of Sinclair's  
alternative to sourness stress, like Olson's, de Certeau's, Carter's and

Deleuze and Guattari's, the significance of movement in relation to place. More interesting, though, is Sinclair's negative characterisation of the city as a form of lethal cultural implosion, given the fact that much of his subsequent work continues to focus on London. The human relation to place is presented as one of avoidance, by culture, of an ultimately unavoidable intensity or heat that is ultimately confronted as the end of life, again in both senses of the word 'end':

Place, finally can be only one thing: where you die. Your own clenched spine secret. The motor word, *logos*, scorched into your chemistry: a sign on the ground that is yours & no-one else's. It is the elimination of absolutely everything, nothing remains, distance is wiped out, a total renunciation of all you have claimed as knowledge up to this moment. Your whole journey has been to find that place which you have dreamt, long before birth (...) to find it & complete the story, which is the suicide bridge, which is the anticipation, sleep's rush on death, the forcing the entry that is something that is not yet, cannot yet be, known. (154)

Place here is represented as an existential condition which the narrative of myth can shape, and to some extent avoid, but not deny - the truth, which culture, as myth, or city, negotiates. Sinclair treads a similar path to Olson and Prynne in this respect but in his references to the urban reminds us that his interests are equally, if

not primarily, with the everyday condition of life in the metropolis.  
It is on this area that his subsequent work increasingly focuses, in  
the approaches to London presented in his first two novels.

## Chapter Eight : White Chappell: Scarlet Tracings

Many of the interests displayed in the earlier prose pieces are developed in *White Chappell: Scarlet Tracings*, Sinclair's first novel. A preoccupation with place is evident but interwoven with an examination of various forms of related cultural production. The approach to human relations with the earth is characterised by a focus on their pathological nature, as in the essay on myth and place. The opening of the novel finds the narrator and three companions travelling in a car and compares them to the four riders of the apocalypse. One of them, Nicholas Lane, suffers from a bizarre medical complaint which allows the novel to begin with a dryly grotesque description of his vomiting up of the contents of his stomach. Another character, Dryfeld, presents his own apocalyptic vision of the present state of Britain:

If the A1 had anticipated itself, Darwin would never have needed to leave these shores. It's all here Monsieur. Only the fittest and most insanely determined life forms can battle across the river to reach the central reservation - then, ha! They are free from predators. They live and breathe under the level of the fumes. They stay on this grass spine, leave the city or the sea coast, escape feral cats and their like, and travel the country, untroubled north or south. The lesser brethren die at the verges. And are spun from our wheels, flung to the carrion. Grantham's daughter this is your vision! And when the cities are finished, abandoned, life will steal back down in this protective tongue.

The new world will evolve *here*. (Sinclair 1988:12)

The appearance of these male companions travelling by car suggests a comparison with novels such as Kerouac's *On the Road*, but, travelling in later times, they are presented as involved in a different kind of quest which involves a return to the city they have come from rather than an outward exploration of the country as a whole. Dryfeld's roadside meditation introduces an element not present in the pieces previously dealt with, that of direct comment on the state of the nation, albeit in ironic mode. His observations resemble those of Arran Gare in terms of Gare's comments on the values of a dominant class-fraction and his near apocalyptic reading of the effects of contemporary cultural values on the well-being of the planet. The impression provided is of an almost posthumous culture, a land of the living dead. The vomiting Nicholas Lane, the reference to the riders of the apocalypse, and Dryfeld's apocalyptic meditation all contribute to this impression which is furthered by the raid on Mossy Noonman. The raid, while suggestive of a bank robbery in an American western, is in fact that of four second-hand book dealers on a second-hand book store. The deathly figures scavenge and haggle over the comparably dead detritus of a literary culture. They are interested in the financial value of the books, not their possible literary merit. The scene depicted is reminiscent of the scavenging world of Dickens's corpse-robbers in *Our Mutual Friend*. Lane is the star, unearthing a treasured first edition of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*, the first published Sherlock Holmes story:

Some covers had been recklessly taped to quite alien interiors, others fixed with rubber solution into brown wrappings. But it had been the name of Beeton's Christmas Annual, and the search for the magic date, 1887, that had settled the price for Nicholas Lane. (25)

Lane estimates that his find, if genuine, will bring him: 'Ten to twenty. Grand. Plus.' (25). Full-stops between the figures suggest the anticipated surprise of someone insufficiently informed about the calculation of value in antiquarian books and thereby indicates a relation to the more documentary aspect of Sinclair's writing here and elsewhere. As with aspects of Surrealism and Situationism, as well as novels like *Moby Dick*, Sinclair's approach is to weave a speculative discourse into a descriptive narrative which is itself closely related to an actual journey or journeys. This is an aspect of his work that can also partly be compared to that of Williams in his use of Glyn in *People of the Black Mountains*. The narrator in the book is an observant, Ishmael-like figure to whom various characters and their obsessions play Ahab. He characterises himself, though, in terms of a London figure: 'The narrator, feeling posthumous, thought of himself as the Late Watson. The secret hero, who buries his own power in the description of other men's triumphs. Dangerous ground.' (15). The novel is also characterised by the narrator's self-conscious and self-doubting observations on the significance of his own and his associates' projects and dealings

in a posthumous, entropic world, where human beings, as in Land's reading of Bataille, seem to be self-destructive fragments of a larger system. While also reminiscent of the work of Burroughs and Pynchon, Sinclair's approach here might again be related to Isabel Armstrong's reading of the significance of grotesque figures who are representative of an alienated human condition under capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

The grotesque, satirical and comic elements of the first strand of narrative are juxtaposed with a second, historical strand, concerned with figures related to the Jack the Ripper murders. The main character here is the surgeon, William Withey Gull, whose name is taken as appropriate in that he is presented as a victim of his own distorted beliefs. Evangelical Christianity and butchery are shown as intimately involved in his earliest days. Sinclair provides a picture of Gull's father sitting down to dinner which is reminiscent of the opening of the second part of *Ulysses*, when the reader is introduced to Bloom and his more healthily sensual appreciation of both liver and women. Sinclair's description presents a humourless follower of the Protestant work ethic whose offspring will be a talented surgeon, capable of more dramatic forms of butchery:

His fist, like a pale crab, went among the warmed meats, slither of kidney, liver, blood-sausage, layered on thick muscular segments of

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<sup>1</sup> See Armstrong (1996: 41-76) as well as earlier references in this respect.



potato. He chewed vigorously, exercising an already powerful jaw; animal fires became his fires. There was no pleasure of the sense in this. Work was life. Life was work. *'Blessed is he who has found his work. (27)*

In contrast to Joyce's rather more celebratory depiction of both the city and humanity in relation to Bloom and Dublin, Sinclair focuses on the negative, pathological aspects of modern capitalist culture and its most representative form of place, the city - here, London. Comparisons can be made here with elements of the work of both Benjamin and Deleuze and Guattari, who take an interest in pathological displacements of healthier or more conventional forms of desire. Benjamin indicates, like Sinclair, a fascination with the evidence and origins of the increasingly commodified world of the modern city, as represented by the arcades of Paris. Deleuze and Guattari are interested in ways of escaping the apparatus of capture, represented by the state, capital and the negative, joyless forms of subjectification in which human beings can become entrapped. The older Gull provides an origin in his primitive but machine-like absorption of the flesh of other animals and his respect for work. His son is presented as a kind of Freudian case study but also as a study in evil, like many late nineteenth century characters from Dr Jekyll to Dorina Gray and Dracula. The presentation of Gull's inverted Christianity is perhaps also comparable to that of Hogg in his *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Joyce's work, this time *The Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man*, is ironically echoed in Gull's first attempts to write : 'Aloga taimma a gaooow lifbb a boagy ho

livin in a hao s.' (28) The language here is not that of parodied baby talk but something, literally carved in stone (on a slate), that is perhaps evocative of an older, ur-language belonging to a time before Christianity or even the Old Testament. As in the essay on Hawksmoor, the relation of modern, urban cultures to much older ones, in terms of basic drives towards self-protection and self-destruction, is explored in a form of gothic which is thick with parody and literary allusions.

This approach is further developed in the narrative strand which follows the exploits of the narrator and his companion, Joblard. Commenting on the development of his interest in London as a place with a history as a form of spiritual pilgrimage (a characterization that allows him to be compared with the more violently pathological figure of Gull), the narrator observes that: 'You allow yourself to become saturated with this solution of the past, involuntary, unwilled, until the place where you are has become another place, and then you can live it, and then it is.' (31). The characterisation of relations with place as saturated with a solution is suggestive of a Jungian, alchemical element. Jung's interest in occult mysticism and ways of reconciling a sense of individuality with that of being at ease with one's life and place in the cosmos are a significant element in Olson's poetry.<sup>2</sup> Olson's version of projection comes as much from Jung as it does from the influence of geography on his work. Here, Sinclair appears to focus on the element of transformation, as in the making of myth or fiction, involved in alchemical operations - an

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<sup>2</sup> See Jung (1968) on his approach to alchemy and Stein (1979) for a study of Olson's adaptation of that approach.

appropriately gothic variation on the notion of projection. Place has to be (re)created, albeit instinctively or unconsciously, but also 'lived', before it 'is'. In one sense, this might be regarded as a mystical or 'cryptic' version of Lefebvre's notion of the 'appropriation' of space by those who are not part of the cultural formation that dominates it.<sup>3</sup> Lefebvre's notions of the appropriation, reappropriation and diversion of dominated spaces are partly related to events in the late sixties (a period towards which much of Sinclair's fiction displays a strong degree of ironically modified nostalgia). They can also be seen as a development of approaches to place and space offered by the French, 'Baudelairean' tradition referred to earlier. It was also noted earlier that Sinclair's approach to place more closely resembles the darker, worldlier side of the earth that Lefebvre sees as being displaced by medieval gothic. One way in which this occurs is through the emergence of repressed or earthy desires. These might be seen as being re-identified in the work of Freud with its emphasis on the workings of unconscious desires and already prefigured in works like Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, whose territory is, in more than one sense, the concern of Sinclair's novel.

As the novel progresses, the nature of Sinclair and Joblard's work - the creation of an area for psychogeographical research - is further elaborated upon. Jobs are taken in order to speak to other workers who inhabit the area and to get the feel of the place:

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<sup>3</sup> See Lefebvre (1991: 164-168)

The zone was gradually defined, the labyrinth penetrated. It was given limits by the victims of the Ripper, the Roebuck and Brady Street to the East, Mitre Square to the West, the Minories to the South, the North largely unvisited. (35)

As in Olson's poetry, the real names of actual, specific places are provided, giving the sense of a report on a project as much a piece of fiction. The main characters are close to being identified as actual individuals - not only Gull and the narrator, but figures like Dryfeld and Joblard, who seem to be thinly disguised versions of Driffield and Brian Catling.

The narrator, reporting on the exploration of place and the related activity of second-hand book dealing undertaken with Lane, Dryfeld and Jamie, continues to dwell on the secondary nature of his own being. Gull perhaps seems a more vividly real character than the contemporary, living characters because his life is completed and can be presented and examined in more detail with the benefit of the passage of time. There are also good (or evil) reasons to remember him because of what he has done. The earlier essay on place and myth suggests that the significance of our life only really begins when we are dead. We then have the possibility of becoming part of something that closely resembles Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, of which both Olson and Sinclair attempt to present a version in relation to place. Sinclair's narrator worries at his function with respect to what does and does not constitute a sense of being, contrasting it with the visual:

The narrator, seeking failure and obscurity, as the only condition spiritually adequate to his self-esteem, is glass; he watches them, not not watching, being. And can only live in them and feeding from them. Which is a state of being as full and as empty as they themselves are. (69)

He becomes, in his own version of himself, a voyeur and a parasite, perhaps a vampire, in his feeding from the lives of those he watches, but concludes that he is not ultimately different and seems to justify his own project, though in uncertain terms. Part of the horror or worldliness of his vision of relations between place and people is the lack of substantive foundation for it. In this respect, he mirrors and embodies the text's self-consciousness about its own questionable status, in contrast to the greater sureness of more confident figures like Gull who '*sees*', or thinks he does, the vision and the work with which God has entrusted him. Reference is made to another confident figure with a vision of this kind at the beginning of the novel, in Dryfeld's reference to 'Grantham's daughter' and her 'vision'.

The later part of the book broadens the element of historical reference and characterisation in the novel in relation to the central historical character of Gull. James Hinton's correspondences with his sister Sarah and his experience of the city as hell is followed by consideration of the work of his son, Howard, by Joblard. As in much gothic fiction, we are presented with a highly mediated approach to what can be considered

actual events, thus again emphasising the cultural significance of the creation of meaning in anything. Howard Hinton manages to achieve, in his book *What Is The Fourth Dimension?*, published in 1887, what Joblard considers to be a vision of some significance:

We have got to imagine some stupendous whole *wherein all that has ever come into being or will come co-exists*, which, slowly passing on, leaves in this flickering consciousness of ours, limited to a narrow space and a single moment, a tumultuous record of changes and vicissitudes that are but to us. So it's all there in the breath of the stones. There *is* a geology of time! We can take the bricks into our hands: as we grasp them, we enter it. (112)

Hinton's vision of a 'fourth dimension', which can take us beyond the prison or trap of our present perceptions, is presented with a strong dose of irony through the palimpsest of Joblard's enthusiasm for 'a geology of time' (Joblard is a sculptor). However, support for this notion is also provided by the narrator, in character as Sinclair, in his discussion of presences in fiction that become something much more than their authors could envisage :

'Accepting the notion of 'presence' – I mean that certain fictions, chiefly Conan Doyle, Stevenson, but many others also laid out a template that that was more powerful than any local documentary account – the presences that they created, or 'figures', if you prefer it, became too much

and too fast to be contained within the conventional limits of that fiction.

They got out into the stream of time, the ether, they escaped into the labyrinth. They achieved an independent existence.’ (129)

This discussion of the independent reality of fictional characters by two fictional characters who are barely distinguishable from actual individuals can be connected here to questions of metafiction, as raised by Pinkney in relation to Williams. Like Williams, Sinclair has something to say about the nature of place as created, by human experience and narratives, but does so in relation to fiction as instinctive mythologising. Place as the repository of people’s experience guides or influences the writers he refers to, as it does many of the characters in the novel, whether they are fictional or non-fictional. Fictional characters become real as they connect to the collective memory of a particular place which, as in Williams, lasts much longer than the lifetime of a generation of living human beings. As with the people of Williams’s Black Mountain area who are ‘deep and gone’ into the earth, so parts of the memories of generations of Londoners can be brought to life through a closer contact with the place where they lived.

What is transmitted, however, is far from reassuring, in terms both of the content and the complexly meditative, if often urbanely humorous, modality of its presentation. Sinclair both interprets and extends, in relation to his own poetics and politics of place, a fascination with the multiplicity and chaos of the city and the human psyche which has influenced its creation - the ‘template’ laid out by the writers he refers

to. An anonymous 'Jack', not the Ripper, but sartorially and existentially, not far removed from him, appears just after their discussion:

Jack presents himself, initially as an alien life form. The light from the streetdoor shines through his gray raincape, beads of sweat trickle down his scalp. His thick glasses are misted over; he is eyeless. His arms are lost within the wings of the cape. (129-30)

Eyeless and armless in appearance, Jack is more shamanistic witness than reincarnation. He proceeds to retrace verbally the steps of Rimbaud and Verlaine in London, another male couple to complement those of Holmes and Watson, or Joblard and the narrator. References to Joblard's forthcoming wedding intensify the sense of a mystical communion with an arcane, psychic history. The phrase 'inner city' is allowed to take on other, possible meanings, and is provided with a daemonically spiritual dimension that makes it rather more of a 'problem' than simply clearing up the more embarrassing aspects of the mess created.

The final section of the novel introduces a further dimension to the complex 'template' that Sinclair has framed in relation to London and elements of its literary and psychic history. This complements the Hinton correspondence by means of a contemporary letter from one 'disenfranchised Scotsman' (165) to another. In his letter to



Sinclair, a fellow poet, Douglas Oliver, discusses the problem of 'dabbling with 'demons'. He wonders, as Sinclair, as narrator, does, whether Sinclair is merely dabbling and concludes by giving him the benefit of the doubt, but no more than that. Again, the novel insists on exposing the precarious nature of its undertaking and that of the more general project of which it is a part.

The narrative progresses to a climax of sorts. A copy of Joblard's book 'Necrophia' is found in the possession of a man who has murdered his wife. The murder takes place in the Leeds area at about the time of the 'Yorkshire Ripper' murders. Gull proceeds with his mission to 'redeem my time' (193) by means of experiments performed on a series of women and is eventually committed to a hospital. He dies a rich man, true to his obsessions. The narrator, at the end of the novel, goes to an upturned boat which would seem to represent Gull's first home, claiming that '(...) the connection will be made, the circuit completed.' (210).

The completion is promised rather than achieved, again suggesting the utopian element in the Baudelairean tradition as characterised by Sheringham. The novel offers an urbanely self-conscious and ironic account of the arcane activities of a number of distinctly eccentric characters who are themselves interested in very disturbing aspects of the significance of London as place. A cryptic history of London, grounded in an investigation of that 'fen of undisclosed horrors' over

which part of Hawksmoor's architecture is constructed, is presented as an alternative to versions of London as capitalist and imperialist success story. This approach is extended and expanded in Sinclair's second, more ambitious novel, *Downriver*.

## Chapter Nine : Downriver

In his study of the development of London from an imperial to a global city, Anthony King offers a comparison between the 'Old Treaty Ports of China' and the new, world cities of which London is a prime example. He characterises the processes involved in the creation of such cities in ways which might serve as a useful prelude to a discussion of Sinclair's second novel, *Downriver*, and the London that it presents:

The processes are embodied in language and represented in space; 'concessions are granted to foreign powers, 'enclaves' are created for tax-free economic activities; and to protect themselves from the 'natives', the representatives of national and international capital retreat into 'compounds' bounded by high fences, locked gates and patrolled by state police or the security guards of private armies. In return for its percentage, the State maintains law and order, invests in the police, and provides the coolies and the social and physical infrastructure.

These metaphors, stark as they may seem, have become real in London since the development of Docklands. (King 1990:146)

King's depiction of late twentieth century Docklands as the repressive space of a colonial police-state itself verges on the gothic and *Downriver* can be regarded as a 'Docklands novel' in terms of its dramatising the

space of an economic and political culture of which Docklands is the primary symbol. More directly than in earlier texts, Sinclair concerns himself, in *Downriver*, with a satirical critique of the values embodied in the life and buildings of nineteen eighties London. As with King's description, he affords considerable attention to London as a post-imperial city.

The novel can be regarded, in many respects, as a continuation of the project undertaken in *White Chappell: Scarlet Tracings*. The narrator and Joblard are still the central, co-ordinating characters, involved in another search for trapped deposits of London's secret history. The scope of the search, though, is wider, incorporating various parts of London, and presented in the form of a 'grimoire of rivers and railways' (408) that resembles an alternative travel guide and history. Another significant element, apart from the attention to aspects of both enterprise and imperial cultures, is the role played by the media. Debord's 'society of the spectacle' is present in various forms in most of the stories.

*Downriver* bears an interesting resemblance to *People of the Black Mountains* in its complex construction of a series of loosely inter-related tales. Williams, as we have seen, presents a cumulative history in a series of forty episodes. Sinclair, in *Downriver*, provides twelve tales, based on visits of different kinds to specific places and usually involving more than one sub-tale. The effect is not so much that of a cumulative history as of a partial, web-like, explorative mapping of some areas of a vast and

complex space. In this respect, it might also be compared to Benjamin's convoluted approach to Paris in *The Arcades Project* or Deleuze and Guattari's mapping of relations between molecular and molar orders of creation, in a series of plateaus, to be read in any order, rather than chronological chapters, in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The bohemian and sociable nature of the exploration conducted by the narrator and Joblard, the continued interest in pathological elements, and the emphasis on exploration as a form of escape from imprisoning aspects of the dominant social order also suggest an affinity with their approach, as does the characteristic of movement within the bounds of a certain area. As with both Deleuze and Guattari and de Certeau, Sinclair explores the potential of open and less visible pockets of space within the bounds of the dominant culture for projects of resistance, subversion and escape.

The twelve tales in the novel take the reader to a variety of locations and related institutions and characters along the river Thames. The opening tale, which provides an introduction to the novel as a whole, consists of twelve parts, the twelfth of which mainly consists of '*Joblard's HEART OF DARKNESS. A Narrative in Twelve Postcards.*' (25). Allusions to Conrad's symbolic tale of exploration are also made in other parts of the tale, as they are to Kerouac at the end of the first section: 'It was time to be out on the road.'(5)

The kinds of exploration the novel offers are ironically reduced versions of the earlier epics to which it alludes. Mock-epic and satire are integral

elements in an exploration of specific parts of the city and their history.

Apocalyptic aspects occur in various forms. The novel opens in Victoria Park and includes a short ecological meditation in connection with a reference to Mrs Thatcher, cast as a form of post-imperial dictator:

I looked out of the bay window at the lovely green lung of Victoria Park. (...) When the park was finally butchered and buried under tarmac by the threatened road schemes, it would all be over. There would be nothing left. The Widow and her gang had decided that Hackney was bad news and the best option was simply to get rid of it, chop it into fragments and choke it in the most offensive heap of civil engineering since the Berlin Wall. (4)

The sardonic humour in evidence here draws attention to processes of fragmentation and destruction focused on by writers like Lefebvre and Harvey as part of the exploitative organisation of social space by accumulative capital, represented, above all, by 'the Widow' and her cronies.<sup>1</sup> A cast of grotesque characters helps to dramatise the nature of the social space explored. Milditch is an explorer of sorts, but also involved in the world of the media by virtue of his participation in film and television drama. The initial description of his activities could be applied to numerous characters in the novel, including the narrator: 'He made deals. He shuffled telephones. He haunted the dead zones of the city looking for

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<sup>1</sup> See Lefebvre (1991: 365-366) Harvey (1990:16-18)

connections that only he could activate.’ (4). Before participating in ‘a three-part Mini series push-on-the-Pole.’ (4), another form of media-deflated expedition, he sends the narrator in the direction of Tilbury Town. This, like many of the locations in the novel, is presented as a ‘dead zone’, which the narrator must activate by looking for appropriate connections. The initial description of the place provides a different image of London from that of glossy guide-book descriptions based on more conventional points of reference such as Piccadilly Circus, Buckingham Palace, or Mayfair:

Tilbury Town is a single street and it is shut (...) The innocent sightseer abandons his guidebook to relish a haberdasher’s grease-streaked window, which features underwear so outdated it has all the nostalgic allure of a fetishist’s catalogue. There is a ‘Financial Consultant’ with a twenty-four hour sideline in radio-controlled mini cabs. And yet more mini cabs. The chief industry of the place is providing the means to escape from it. (6)

The energy of the prose seems to be partly motivated by the challenge of registering the degree of entropic inanity a culture can achieve. It has ‘also been one of the dark places of the earth’ (6), as the narrator, quoting Conrad, reminds us earlier in the section, and as presented here, it would seem to have returned to, or maintained, that condition. Reference is also made in an earlier part of the section to ‘(...) the river: black, costive,

drawing me on; flaunting the posthumous brilliance of its history .' (6).

Here, again, there is a characterisation of London, and its river, as post-imperial, but 'posthumous brilliance' might also serve as a description for the sardonic articulateness of the prose which is used to evoke its condition. Like the baroque drama explored by Benjamin, the 'baroque realism', (as the narrator characterises it) of the approach taken offers redemption only in the form of the death of the culture it depicts: a dead zone that can only be reactivated by 'making connections' and re-activating, its dark, suppressed history in opposition to surface notions of glamour and material success.

All of this is achieved in a style which appears to attempt to outstare the horror of what it records. This involves depiction of the activity of an army of minor characters sifting through the detritus of a cultural economy that operates on rapid development and turnover. One character, Iddo Okoli, would seem to be equally at home in the world of distant parts of continents once part of the British Empire and the current 'beached detritus of the Imperial Dream'(15), whether in the form of used books or discarded household appliances. Later in the novel, he presides as the leader of a voodoo ceremony at the heart of the British sector of 'voodoo economics' in Docklands.<sup>2</sup>Conversations between the 'Connoisseurs of Crime', expeditions to the World's End (at Tilbury) and the obscure palimpsest of Joblard's postcard narrative all contribute to the sense of both a labyrinth and a dead end. The zone is comparable to that created by

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<sup>2</sup> See Harvey (1990: 329-335) for a discussion of voodoo economics and the casino economy. Iddo Okoli reappears in the role of a voodoo chief at the heart of Docklands in the ninth tale of *Downriver: 'The Isle of Doges: Vat City (plc)'*



Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), particularly as later tales break down the distinction between actual and perceived reality, but this is always related to the exploration of actual places in London. The result, as in Pynchon, is a mystery which the narrative will only partially clarify. As in Deleuze and Guattari, the chaotic and the absurd are treated in relatively positive terms, in contrast to the more socialist and humanist narratives of Williams or Lefebvre, where issues of justice and social progress are treated more seriously and solemnly.

Nevertheless, as with Williams, it is the significance of place, its specificity and history, which constitutes one of the principal positive elements in Sinclair's approach. The second tale begins with the detailed description of a tiny enclave of hidden, historical space, not so far accessible to the creative destruction of modern urban planning, in the form of redevelopment for expensive residential properties:

The marmosets have gone. Why else should we meet in this place? A  
A graveyard detached from its host: a church tower faking a period  
grandeur, while its body tumbles wantonly into decay behind  
corrugated-iron fencing. From the low steps of St John's, Scandrell  
Street, I mourn the loss of another secret locale. A *temenos* remaining  
secret because we do not need to visit it. It is there and that is enough.  
The balance of our psychic map of the city is unharmed. But now  
another disregarded inscape has been noticed and dragged from  
cyclical time to pragmatic time: has been asked to justify itself (34)

Sinclair's evocation of place is complexly mediated and usually redolent of decadence. The description of the place as *temenos* suggests an older, sacred relation to the earth, in contrast to the pragmatic functionalism of the modern cultural economy subsequently referred to. The 'balance of our psychic map' might be connected to the concerns of writers like Lynch and Jameson but also, further back in time to the concerns of poets such as Hopkins ('another disregarded inscape') and the Tennyson of poems like 'The Kraken' with its forebodings about the effects of modernisation on the delicate balance of an older ecology.<sup>3</sup>

The marmosets referred to at the beginning of the passage are, like many of the human characters in the novel, victims who belong to and are consumed by their relation to place:

The marmosets were caged in huts and experimental basements. Mild theoreticians in white coats probed with blades for the sources of memory. (...) The skull, finally, was a hollow membrane lit by torches: 'memory' was active – and unlocated. The landscape is destroyed, but the dream of it is everywhere. (34)

The theme of controlled behaviour and damaged cerebral and neural activity is redolent of work by Pynchon and Burroughs but also the

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<sup>3</sup> See Armstrong (1993:53-6) for an analysis of 'The Kraken' which is attentive to these elements.

poetry of J.H. Prynne, and, again, Tennyson.<sup>4</sup> Much of the search, in *Downriver* takes place through dreams, fantasies and other comparable states of consciousness. The sentence is suggestive of an attitude of nostalgia but also of more subversive possibilities. It would seem equally applicable to the projects of Olson or the Surrealists as to the cultures of colonised native cultures in America, Australia and elsewhere.

The two main characters in the story, Todd Sileen and Adam Tenbrucke are as damaged as the marmosets and both make their exits during its course. The one-legged, Conrad-obsessed, Ahab-like Sileen makes only a brief appearance, to return in a later novel.<sup>5</sup> Tenbrucke plays a more central role, a figure reminiscent of characters in the work of both Pynchon and Poe.<sup>6</sup> Trapped in his corrupted, entropic, antiquarian world and body, he dissolves in front of the reader's eyes:

He felt his brain drowning in occult semen, pearly slime dropping slowly on to sawdust, cold honey leaking from the sharp drip of a teaspoon. His residence was a controlled environment. Each object smirked in self-justification. It knew its value. It 'appreciated' as fast as its curator. Tenbrucke was dying, decaying, sweating himself away. (40-41)

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<sup>4</sup> Here Armstrong's (1993:86-94) discussion of alienation in relation to 'The Lotos Eaters' is of relevance. Prynne's collection 'Wound Response' in Prynne(1982) particularly focuses on images of alienated or disturbed forms of consciousness.

<sup>5</sup> See *Radon Daughters* (Sinclair 1995)

<sup>6</sup> See Pynchon's story 'Entropy' (Pynchon (1985:81-98) and Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher'.

Tenbrucke manages to make the corruption he embodies even more spectacular and challenging in a final piece of performance art. His unwitting audience is represented by two 'dangerously healthy-looking' octogenarian, Californian tourists who are already aware of London's tendency to disintegration:

This frigging town was awash with terrorists brandishing poisoned umbrellas, crazy Irish bombers, Arabs spitting in your food, and fall-out from Russia stripping the trees. If you could find a train that was moving it was sure to explode. (42-3)

One person's or one country's disintegration can be another's development. Sinclair's text, like much late nineteenth century gothic fiction, makes ample allusion to London's degenerate nature but also, if usually in satirically negative terms, to its extraordinary ethnic, and thereby, social and political diversity. Sinclair's London is not a safe or clean place in any sense, in contrast to the self-enclosed world of the 'shrink-wrapped, sterile' tourists who are the epitome of the safe, clean, sterile, non-place. Tenbrucke, on the other hand, embraces the corruptions of body, place and the earth's elements, chaining himself to the river-bank, viewing the landscape in ultimate terms and opening himself, psychically and sexually in a final act of union: 'He opened his mouth and swallowed everything that was coming.' (48). Like Carter's William Light, and like many other characters in Sinclair's novel, he disappears, or dissolves, into the landscape. The provocative gothic extremities of the

comic elements also display a considerable degree of affinity with the approach of Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. 'Zones of transition', the preferred social space of *Downriver*, have much in common with Deleuzoguattarian notions of 'becoming'. The latter are sometimes also presented in comic-gothic form, as in the case of the rapidly and unpredictably evolving Professor Challenger in the plateau entitled '10,000 B.C. The Geology of Morals' or the references to B-Movies, Lovecraft and Borges in 1730: *Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal...*<sup>7</sup> A positive, almost celebratory, attitude towards disturbing, differential or chaotic elements might be claimed as characteristics of both gothic literature and post-structuralist philosophy and are integral to Sinclair's approach to place. London characterised in this fashion might thus be seen as helpful to devolutionary or dis-integrative processes of change in other parts of Britain.

Another element which emerges in this and other stories is that of the artist as shaman, a figure common in much American poetry, and one relatable to the bardic figures of older European cultures. The narrator himself undergoes a visit to the underworld, in the form of the Rotherhithe Tunnel, before emerging into another world, on the other side of the river and is then '(...) confronted with the legend of Prince Lee Boo' (52), a sacrificial victim of British imperialism who haunts the area, and whose tale he then relates.

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<sup>7</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 39-74, 239-252)

Similar elements are present in the next tale, *Horse Spittle (The Eros of Maps)*, whose subtitle again indicates a significant relationship between desire and orientation. The central figure is another self-sacrificing character Edith Cadiz. She is approached through a palimpsest of media-oriented activity by the narrator and his colleagues:

If we did not impose the reflex inhibitions of disbelief, we would surely come, without strain, to the heart of the tale. We no longer believed in 'Spitalfields' as a concept; in 'zones of transition', New Georgians, the 'deal', or any of that exhausted journalistic stuff. We had something much better: a story we did not understand. It is always much more enjoyable to play at detectives than at 'researchers', who gather the evidence to justify the synopsis they have already sold. (60)

The orientation is always towards something less immediately tangible than the pretentious surface images which are sought and peddled by the media figures in whose machinations the narrator and his associates are partly enmeshed. Edith Cadiz emerges as a combination of earth-mother and *femme fatale*. With a name reminiscent of Edith Cavell's, she works as a nurse by day, stripper and prostitute by night, presenting an alternative, or supplementary, cultural economy to that promoted by capitalist social relations. Her most memorable act is a surrealistic striptease in which her dog-companion strips layers of London street-map

from her body, engaging the desire of her audience as the geography of London writhes in waves of erotically charged transformation:

(...) her wolf-dog leaps from the audience, rushes to her, takes the brass ring in his wet mouth, and pulls away a Spitalfields terrace with a twist of his powerful neck. The jagged gap reveals new streets, fresh relations: Edenic glimpses. The tired city is transformed: a dustpit fades to expose an orchard, a church lifts through a sandbank, a hospital (with blazing windows) slides beneath the surface of a slow-moving river. The punters are maddened. The Thames attacks Hornsey. Leadenhall Market removes to Chingford. (63)

In her erotic and self-sacrificial mode of behaviour Edith provides an alternative cultural economy to that of capitalism comparable to the approach of Bataille or the appropriations of capital's more positive elements pursued by Deleuze and Guattari in their more flexibly abstract figure of the nomad and related concepts.

Edith is complemented by Meic Triscombe, M.P. who connects the occult elements in the tale to those of contemporary political satire. At the end, he meditates on the failure of an attempt to gain some personal credit from events arranged to support Abóriginal land rights and revive the memory of 'Old King Cole', an Aborigine cricketer, who, like Lee Boo, failed to survive his visit to the imperial metropolis:

Why had he bothered? There was no ethnic percentage in Abos. Now that he had thought about it, he convinced himself that there weren't any in Hackney, We had everything else: Blacks, Indians, Pakis, Turks, Kurds, Greeks, Yids, Fascists, Pinks, Greens, Gays – but hardly an Australian of any type. A few back-packing antipodean dykes got into the schools; but they moved on fast. And good riddance. (86)

As with the tourists in the previous tale, the intolerance and cynicism of modern forms of cultural abjection are satirically contrasted with London's complex and haunted cultural diversity.

The geographical area focused on in the next two tales is primarily Spitalfields, with questions of image coming to the fore as the researchers venture into the arena of another medium, that of television and the B.B.C. The latter is linked to the culture of venture capital by being christened as 'The Corporation' (92). As with Triscombe and professional politicians, 'The Vatican', its other, more gothic-sounding title, receives satirical attention, in terms of its 'dogma', summarised in precepts such as 'There are two sides (and only two) to every argument.'(92). As in Sinclair's previous novel, the narrator and his colleagues find difficulty in sifting the authentic from the pretentious, and financial profit from either. Spitalfields is the right name for the area because of the appropriate associations: 'Spitalfields': the *consiglieri* liked the sound of it, the



authentic whiff of heritage, drifting like cordite from the razed ghetto. But, please, do not call it 'Whitechapel' or whisper the dreaded 'Tower Hamlets'. (93) Here, relatively recent ghosts emerge to trouble the clearing and paving-over of the locality evoked by Carter in *The Lie of the Land* and Sinclair insists on a comparably close attention to the complexities of its contours in relation both to geography and to the histories held within it, but in an altogether more parodic and satirical modality. His approach consists of diving into and through the multiple layers of rubbish thrown up by a near endless series of socio-economic, technological and cultural transformations to find what treasures might have been thrown up in their wake. In the sixth tale, the creation of the Docklands Light Railway provides such an opportunity. As with, Edith Cadiz's striptease, the cityscape becomes open to transformation, this time in the form of a rerun of the original bout of 'creative destruction' that saw the beginning of the railways:

The privatization of the railways carried us straight back into all the original excitements - and most of the chaos – that attended the birth of the system. Unchallenged social changes generated their own hubris: anything was possible. Demons slipped the leash. We were lords of creation. We could tear down and reshape cities; send iron ladders steeping out over the unregistered landscape. (158)

The new railway again damages ('casually amputated') a 'dream site', that of the Aboriginal cricketer, King Cole, who appeared in the third tale. Here Sinclair includes a variation of the refrain in the second story : 'The dream was maimed but not destroyed: disregarded' (164). A later section speculates on some of the effects of 'railway time', particularly in its newly privatized version:

The myriad routes and branches that followed on the unrestricted planning permission granted to the railway companies meant that time was also deregulated, released from its bureaucratic prison: now anyone with voting shares could call the shots. We were recklessly plunged into a lake of temporal Esperanto...(171)

In a manner comparable with that of Deleuze and Guattari's nomad, taking advantage of the open space provided by capital's destabilization of settled practices, but also that of Olson, moving with combinations on a specific territory, Sinclair produces his own form of speculative venture, investing that space with his own anarchic *imaginaire* rather than converting it in accordance with the latest requirements of processes of capital accumulation.<sup>8</sup>

Connections between place and fascism, were made in Sinclair's essay on myth and place. The third quarter of the novel explores some of these connections in the context of nineteenth eighties Britain, moving first to the

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<sup>8</sup> The allusion in relation to Olson is to 'The Librarian', ( in Olson (1970) : 'In this night I moved on the territory with combinations/ ( new mixtures) of old and known personages'

suburbs. The *Prima Donna* of the seventh tale most obviously refers to the main protagonist of the tale within that tale which makes up its sixth section, but might also refer to its teller, John Millom, or, even more obliquely to the first lady of state and champion of suburbia in the nineteen eighties, Mrs Thatcher. The narrator, Sinclair, in the course of his investigations for his next book, chooses Millom out of a myriad of conspiracy-enthusiasts who contact him as a result of reading his first novel. He takes a train again, this time to ‘ (...) the complacent ruralist calm of Leyton.’ (195) Millom meets him at the station and then takes him home, in Calderon Road, in order to tell his tale itself influenced by Calderon, with whose play *The Surgeon of Honour*, he empathises: ‘I could have written the thing myself, take way the language.’ (197).

Millom, who carries a swordstick, is presented as a darkly comic avatar of Jack the Ripper, keen to purify humanity of its sins. As in the baroque world of Calderon and Benjamin’s book on *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, where the only form of redemption in this respect lies in death, Leyton is presented as an appropriate spatial context:

The cheesy net curtains did nothing to filter out the inhuman entropy of High Road, Leyton; an embolic flutter of muddied Transits, partially resprayed Cortinas, and an angry boil of citizens scouting for the first rumours of the bus pack. The street had no evident purpose beyond proving the Third Law of Thermodynamics (Every substance has a limited availability of energy...). (199)

The passage is reminiscent of the description of Tilbury Town in the first part of the book where : ‘The chief industry of the place is providing the means to escape from it’ (6). Millom’s location in a dormitory, commuter suburb suggests its role as the entropic heartland of a reactionary tendency away from a culture sympathetic to notions of difference and towards a monolithic culture of death. The story begins and ends with the depiction of an even more zombie-like character, Cec Nettlewhite, who drives lorryloads of radio-active waste to secret depots in the small hours of the morning:

Cec had been turned down for the buses on the grounds of ‘poor road sense’:but the spooks found him perfectly suitable, a clean profile. He was deaf, impotent, suffering the onset of premature senility: a psychoneurotic, prone to paranoid anxiety. He had a bad marriage and no friends. His moral judgements were untrustworthy. He was just about capable of keping his hand on the steering column. The ideal man: he fitted the job description to the letter. (190)

Cec might also be seen as the ideal member of other, comparable organizations who can use the service of such disaffected and dysfunctional individuals. The primary textual linking of such characters to Mrs Thatcher and her regime, apart from suburbia and notions of

purification, lies in Millom's claim, at the end of his interview with Sinclair, to have become 'one of us' (212). The satirical element in relation to the dominant political culture of the nineteen eighties may not be paramount but is usually present. It provides an interesting fictional complement to aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's approach to micro-elements or microfascisms in the composition of societies, which can fuse into the sudden build up of dangerously reactive, paranoid forces.<sup>9</sup>

The element of political satire in relation to developments in contemporary urban space is rather more explicit in the next two tales. The first, 'Art of the State (*Silvertown Memorial*)', focuses on the relationship between monumental architecture and political absolutism, a theme focused on by numerous analysts of urban space. Mumford tends towards suspicion of the baroque and the classical as supportive of absolutist tendencies in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe. Harvey registers a strong degree of disquiet at the 'organization of spectacle and theatricality' of post-modern urban centres, combined with 'voodoo economics', as representative of: 'The triumph of aesthetics over ethics...'<sup>10</sup>

Lefebvre also includes a relatively neutral consideration of 'monumentality' as a significantly transcendent aspect of architecture, taking the Taj Mahal as an example, and moves on to a characterisation

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<sup>9</sup> See the ninth plateau '1933 Micropolitics and Segmentarity' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:208-231) for a general discussion in this respect and (1988:215-217) for a specific discussion of 'microfascisms'.

<sup>10</sup> See Harvey (1990 : 93, 329)

of 'monumental space as that which signifies the sacred and excludes the profane or obscene. 'The obscene', he claims, 'is a general category of social practice, and not of signifying processes as such: exclusion from the scene is pronounced silently by space itself.' (Lefebvre 1991:226).

The narrator and his associates, in this and the next tale, are increasingly excluded from the scene of the dominant culture, as they watch it from a distance or concealed in secrecy. Similarly, many of the characters whose tales are told are obscene, in this more specific sense of off-scene, and in the general challenge they present to a pristine culture of authoritarian spectacle. The seventh tale opens with an extravagantly grotesque parody of Mrs Thatcher, 'The Widow', as the central figure in a technically enhanced neo-baroque, politically authoritarian paradise:

One morning...the newspapers loud with her praise, the *Sun* in its heaven, banked television monitors floating a cerulean image-wash, soothing and silent, streamlets of broken Wedgwood crockery, satellite bin lids flinging back some small reflection of the blue virtue she had copyrighted, (...) the widow rose from her stiff pillows - bald as Mussolini - and felt the twitch start in her left eyelid. She ordered the *immediate* extermination of this muscular anarchy. (...) She was a couple of years into her fifth term in what was now effectively a one-party state and a one-woman party - what *could* be wrong ? (219/220)

The various elements of the Widow's regime, personal and political, are included at one stage or another in the tale, from the *Sun* to the Saatchi brothers ('The Sh'aaki Twins'). A working lunch of the Steering Committee to discuss the planning of a memorial to her dead 'Consort' forms a major part of the tale. What Harvey characterises as the dubious eclecticism of postmodernist architecture and its tendencies towards even more dubious forms of neoclassicism are similarly connected here to the world of neo-Victorianism and free-market economics:

'I see it, I see it!' the Architect cried out, with all the agony of a convent.  
'You're reviving Speer. I've thought for some time, though one has been reluctant to admit it – he's a quite respectable figure once you move him from the sleazy *milieu* in which he operated. (233-234)

In subversive opposition to this project, Imar O'Hagan, an associate of the narrator builds his own, alternative monument, a bunker modelled on the Silbury Hill complex. As in many parts of Sinclair's writing, reference to a much older culture, closer to the earth forms part of the cryptic space offered as part of a fugitive resistance to the unifying domination of modern cultural imperialism. The tale following, set mainly in the Isle of Dogs, begins with a vision of Sinclair's native area of South Wales being 'leased' to '(...) Onoka-Mishima Investments (Occidental)...'(263) and Britain as a banana republic similarly 'leased' to various manifestations of

international venture capital. This includes London, where :’The occult logic of ‘market forces’ dictated a new geography.’ (265). Voodoo economics almost become literal, centred in the new Venice and Vatican of the Isle of Dog(e)s, in a parody of the British gothic novel’s demonization of Roman Catholicism. At the centre of this combination of all things terrible is ‘the Widow’, the destructive monster created by the failings of the national psyche:

‘I’m convinced’, said Davy, ‘we are confronted by a demonic entity entity, a blue-rinse succubus draining the good will of the people.

That woman can’t be stopped without a stake through the heart, burial where four roads meet, a fist of garlic up the rectum. She’s a force of nature, but she’s not self-created (...) The Widow is the focus of our own lack of imagination: the robot of our greed and ignorance...(267)

The alternative community sheltering in O’Hagan’s bunker then attempt to penetrate ‘Vat City’, the chosen name for Docklands, and a social space graphically dramatised but close to that of the sketch drawn by Anthony King at the beginning of this chapter. Their chosen mode of transport is a curragh, again redolent of much older cultures that are more attentive to the earth. They penetrate to the centre and find various of the novel’s characters involved in voodoo ceremonies of the blackest kind. The only escape from this nightmare space, the narrator decides is ‘(...) to believe more strongly in some other reality, a place beyond this place.’(295) An



attention to place which can be interpreted as both utopian and nostalgic, or as a form of 'dreaming' which can be connected to Surrealists or Aborigines, rescues the heroes from their predicament. They dream of 'the gentle slopes of Mudchute Hill'(296) and subsequently find themselves there.

The final tales continue this movement of escape away from the nightmare centre of Docklands. The eleventh tale primarily takes the form of a pilgrimage to the home of a relatively unknown poet, Nicholas Moore, in St Mary Cray, near Orpington. Here we are presented with pure documentary, with no fictional modifications, in stark contrast to the previous tale. This is presented mainly through the medium of an edited interview with another poet, Peter Riley, who tells the story of Moore's life and career and his connections to better known poets. Moore is presented as a figure in internal exile, wasting away from diabetes and in a culture which has less and less time for poetry. Riley emphasizes that 'He didn't relate to this locality in any sense.'(315) but Sinclair insists on exploring it, by way of the river, and through the eyes of Moore, providing the reader with an alternative approach to this part of London's outer suburbia. Sinclair presents his reader here with a view of the poet as representative of an alternative, almost lost culture, dying of neglect. Moore is linked, by implication, to the ghosts we have encountered in previous tales and there is a strong kinship with the kinds of figure documented by Paul Carter in his approach to relations to the land in the Australian context. Riley notes Moore's attitude to poetry: ' There was a

large sense that poetry is very important and was everywhere abused. He felt that what he was writing was important that the world was losing it. There was no access to the world.' (312) He also observes his relation to the land, if only in the form of his suburban garden:

The garden looked like a wilderness, but the pattern was still there underneath. All it needed was weeding. This was a great creative work of his. He cultivated his own hybrids of irises and Michaelmas daisies and *sempervivums*. (313).

As with many of Sinclair's fictional characters, there is a powerful element of eccentricity and at least of physical corruption, as Moore struggles to garden in his wheel chair, dying of diabetes but still consuming good food and wine. Like the historical characters such as Lee Boo or King Cole, he suffers a death which is obscene in both the conventional and Lefebvrian senses, wasting away in internal exile. Like Carter's von Strehlow and the Aranda culture that fascinated him, or William Light, he is seen as representative of something lost and disappearing, but not totally. Sinclair makes a point of ending the chapter, after his 'pilgrimage' (317) along this part of the river, with '*Sempervivum!*'. The relative lack of comic, ironic or fantastic elements in these parts of the story suggest a degree of affinity with Carter's approach to his Australian figures.

A journey on the river, to the estuary, is the focus of the penultimate tale, which mixes allusions to *Moby Dick* with more numerous references to *Three Men in a Boat*. The notion of pilgrimage is maintained with the ultimate destination of the Isle of Sheppey occupying the role of an ironised utopia, a space which is off-scene with regard to what is presented as the oppressively dominant culture: '(...) to carry us downriver: beyond the known station of Tilbury towards the potential mysteries of Sheerness. From the Isle of Dogs to the Isle of Sheep: a pilgrimage towards Hope, and for Joblard a quest for his origins. (325) The inclusion of a 'quest for origins', while ironically developed, again indicates a kinship with Olson's, Carter's and Williams's notions of pasts that could have been developed into better futures. At the same time, the ironic presentation of such quests is indicative of an equal degree of affinity with a politics and poetics of difference that uses the past as a resource to challenge the conformities of universalizing dogmas with claims to a monopoly on the truth.

The implications of the transformation from dockland to Docklands are explored in relation to Woolwich. The liberating obscenity of the old place is contrasted with the sanitised confinement of its regeneration. First, there is a description of the relatively fortunate fate of those later housed in the hulks: 'Dissenters and criminals (marginal to the needs and legitimate needs of the state) were once spilled into the wilderness of an unmapped world..' (336) These are characters like those in the novel, but they are later imprisoned in the prison hulks '...a floating Gatwick without the duty-frees. The only

destination was death.’(336) These are then linked to the cultural complement of ‘enterprise’, that of heritage:

Now the hulks were occupied once more, under the co-sponsorship of English Heritage, who had lovingly restored them to the last detail of authenticated squalor. This daringly simple solution had been unveiled by the Widow in her keynote Marshalsea speech...(336)

The Marshalsea speech is attended by Sir Alec Guinness, player of Dorrit senior in the film production of Dicken’s novel. The Widow reminds her audience that: ‘A prison is a state of mind’ and then goes on to outline her own, carceral vision of fragmented, domesticated, neo-nationalist ‘freedom’: (...)*let every man become his own warder, protecting the things he loves best: his family, his home, his country.* Then, and only then, will We discover what *true freedom means.*’ (337). The regal, capitalised ‘We’ is maintained throughout the speech. Here, to use Lefebvre’s terms, the representation of a space, that of ‘truth’, in the speech, is nicely contrasted with the (carceral) truth of that space – if the reader chooses to accept the narrative’s rather than the speech’s perspective.

Further downriver, pondering on the fate of the riverboat, the *Alice*, the narrator’s mind begins to drift, forming associative patterns from and with the landscape, in a manner reminiscent of the technique of *macchiare* to which Paul Carter is attentive in relation to painters like Giorgione.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Carter (1996: 175-176)

Something happens with the draw of time. With names. The *Alice*.

Fleeing from the extreme interest of Lewis Carroll (...)

Dodgson Dodge-son. Out on the river with another man's daughters: Lorina, Alice, Edith (...) *Edith Street*, E2. Only the names survive; riding the tide of history like indestructible plastic. (342)

One is reminded here of de Certeau's comments on street-names in Paris: 'A strange toponymy that is detached from actual places and flies high over the city like a foggy geography of 'meanings' held in suspension...(de Certeau 1984:104). The Situationist technique of drifting, close to De Certeau's concerns here, and the equally suggestive, associative notion of *macchiare* can be seen as applicable to Sinclair's approach in much of the book and, again, it is the combination which is of particular interest, combining the urban with older notions of place.

Sinclair himself is the focus of the final tale. He disappears out of his novel, leaving Joblard, in the role of Ishmael to his Ahab, to take over the narrative, while he becomes part of the company of eccentric spirits of place in a posthumous culture that his own grimoire has conjured up. A grim trudge around the Isle of Sheppey concludes the novel as both Joblard and Sinclair, who has now become totally speechless, look for an ending, a way out. Joblard begins to believe in the virtues of place, of fiction, and

particularly a combination of the two, transforming Sheppey into another *temenos*:

This is an island that is *not* the world. It is removed, discrete; one of those transitory border zones, caught in uncertain weather, nudged, dislocated by a lurch in the intensity of the light. A special place, where, I'd like to believe, 'good persists in time'.

These are not my thoughts. This is not what I want to say. 'Good', if it still survives, is sustained by its concubine, 'evil; its sullen dependant. There is only the *will towards good* asserted by these unnoticed landscapes. And the quality we discover in ourselves as we are drawn towards them. 'Good' is a retrospective title. To be used when it's all over.

(401)

The element of projection and the ethical battle are insisted upon at the end, which finally ends with an imaginary cricket match and the delivery of the manuscript of the novel, left in ' (...) the hands of the cashier at the Indian supermarket in Heneage Street.' (407).

Sinclair has produced two more novels, *Radon Daughters* and *Landor's Tower*, as well as a non-fictional tour of London, *Lights Out for the Territory* but these will not be considered here, as their dates of publication are considerably later than those of Williams's last novel and the focus of the two novels is not restricted to London.

In *Downriver*, Sinclair produces a focused perspective on Britain's capital, which includes significant elements derived from aspects of American and French, as much as British, writing. The effect is one comparable with the satirical fantasies of British writers such as Swift, Dickens or Butler, as well as being comparable to those of American authors such as Burroughs or Pynchon. At the same time, the novel provides evidence of a sympathetic attitude to the concerns of epic strains in twentieth century British and American modernist and neo-modernist poetry, as well as to those of writers in a disruptive, ironical tradition of reflective subversion and appropriation, stretching from Baudelaire to the Situationists and beyond.

## Conclusions

References to a poetics and politics of place and its relations have been made at various stages. The linking of poetry and politics emerges most clearly in the work of writers whose concerns are closely connected to questions of place and the earth. Heidegger's work is one of the notable instances in the twentieth century of a relating of philosophical thinking to both poetry and the earth. He focuses on the nature and extent of the alienation of human thought from care for the planet in ways that both Arran Gare and Edward Casey regard as being of major significance. The regaining of a more responsible form of relation to the planet and cosmos is seen as crucial. While the political element related to Heidegger's project has been a major obstacle to providing more positive interpretations of his work, Anna Bramwell's account of the development of ecological thinking indicates that he was not alone in developing dangerously reactionary forms of political orientation. Even David Harvey, while expressing clear reservations about the unmediated and essentialistic aspects of Heidegger's approach to place and the earth, recognises, to an extent which contemporaries such as Doreen Massey find dubious, the significance and power of his appeal to notions of home and rootedness. Edward Relph's evocation of placelessness was observed to be Heideggerean in its approach and also connectable to earlier criticisms of modern urban planning and the socio-economic system from which it stems, such as those produced by Mumford, Jacobs or Lynch.



To open a concluding discussion of relations between place, poetics and politics from this perspective might seem to confirm the suspicion that reactionary or nostalgic elements hold these three concepts together, even in the latter half of the twentieth century. Olson's poetry provides the opening case study in this respect. He writes a radically open form of verse in conjunction with a highly ambitious poetic that relates developments in psychoanalysis and process philosophy to a searching examination of myth and history. A centred sense of self, grounded in a deeply explored relation to place is promoted against what is perceived as the shallow commercialism of a dominant contemporary culture. As with Pound's epic, politics are of central significance to the poetry but are nearly always examined at a local level. The problem is whether epic projects like Olson's, more than approaches of relatively limited scope, manage sufficiently to challenge and provide credible alternatives to the disorientating, nihilistic tendencies they dramatically evoke.

The place focused on in Olson's epic is small but the dimensions of the relations projected onto it are formidable, as well as being complex and arcane in their expression. In partial contrast, Sinclair highlights the arcane elements of his approach in a mode of grotesque irony, which satirises but never totally dismisses them. Williams, unlike Sinclair, has no direct relationship with Olson's writing, but his last novel covers a comparable range of time in relation to an equally comparable specificity of geographical focus. In Williams's approach, though, there is no more than a hint of arcane knowledge. Issues are presented in as clear a fashion

as possible. At the same time, his depiction of the landscape of the Black Mountains suggests an area that will not instantly surrender itself to a stranger. It is not the other-oriented tourist place of Edward Relph's negative characterisation but has to be lived with and worked at to be properly understood. This is perhaps indicative of a degree of affinity with the notion of truth as something difficult, as well as a degree of protectiveness that suggests a partially exilic stance.

Sinclair, particularly in *Downriver*, offers an approach which is characterised by a complex, ironically mediated sense of mysticism in relation to place, as well as strong elements of satire and parody. At the same time, a sense of superiority to and disdain for the culture represented by the Widow and her gang is still present. Sinclair's novels speak for the values of an artist-ocracy, so to speak, rather than those of any landed class. They inhabit a territory which, in formal terms, seems to lie on the border between cliqueish, precious, poeticism and urbane, democratic satire. Williams, in *People of the Black Mountains*, also includes a degree of gentle parody of the various cultural modes his novel takes us through, but also speaks for the people of an area in a manner which might be seen as partly reminiscent of the ancient bards.

Both Arran Gare and Paul Carter strive, in different ways, to produce a politics and poetics of place and the earth which avoids the traps of defensive essentialism or reactionary nostalgia. Gare's ecological politics include elements which verge on both. His condemnation of

later twentieth century culture as nihilistic might be seen as evidence of conservatism, as might his enlisting of Vico against the modernism of Descartes. His approach to Heidegger is partly critical but also emphasises his positive achievements. Like Olson, however, Gare protects himself from charges of nostalgia by a strong interest in positive and progressive elements in modern thought. Furthermore, his approach offers a global politics to counter tendencies in global capitalism, one which emphasises justice as a process of recognition and tolerance of the nature and practices of others. Again, this approach is not without a potentially dangerous element - his view of the role and nature of nationalism. But the kind of nationalism Gare proposes bears a strong resemblance - particularly in the way in which relatively small and non-imperialistic forms of nation are proposed as models - to what might equally well be regarded as a form of regionalism. Gare presents not merely a politics but a philosophical poetics in the form of a wide-ranging and complex narrative regarding perceptions of relations between different elements of the cosmos. Like Lefebvre and Harvey, Gare is sensitive to the problem of complicity with fragmenting elements in a totalising, nihilistic culture represented by the notion of a global culture of dissociated minorities and insists on the virtues of a strong, if complex and flexible, narrative.

In Paul Carter, while there is a strong emphasis on the virtues of interactive communication, the priority is on an attentive relation to the land which is primarily presented in terms of the behaviour

of peoples whose culture predates the epoch of modern capital and nation-state imperialism. This includes, though, elements of Renaissance art, in the form of Giorgione's curvilinear aesthetic, and more recent forms of sympathy with the uneven nature of the landscape, whether in the form of Light's cultural hybridity and atmospheric sensitivity or Prynne's peripatetic aesthetic in *Kitchen Poems* or *The White Stones*. Elements of movement and a cultural diplomacy derived from an openness and sensitivity to the difference(s) represented by the local environment are elements central to Carter's approach. The examples presented are neither static nor exclusive, but they do insist on a complex poetic of sympathy with the environment.

As observed earlier, there is overlap between Carter's approach and that of Deleuze and Guattari, although one needs to be cautious about asking the concept of nomadism to do too much work. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari also work with a long time scale to escape from more limiting forms of historicising into a potentially more open form of social space. Deleuze and Guattari's 'smooth' space is characterised by unevenness and heterogeneity, comparable not only to Carter's versions of place but also to the rugged, relative impenetrability of Williams's constantly colonised Black Mountain area. Sinclair's depictions of the operations of locally situated and sensitive individuals also suggests another location beneath the

social striations of a dominant culture of finance and property speculation. Like Carter, but to a greater extent, Deleuze and Guattari, insist on the virtues of movement in relation to 'smooth' space. De Certeau's approach to questions of social space seems particularly comparable to that of Deleuze and Guattari in terms of its emphasis on a polemological analysis of the deployment of tactics on occupied territory. On both counts, Deleuze and Guattari offer a less cautious and reflective rhetoric than de Certeau, developing a poetics and politics of local operations, molecularity, movement and difference in relation to social developments that tend to stultify such tendencies.

The writers most critical of semiotic or rhetorical approaches to questions of social space are Lefebvre and Harvey. Lefebvre presents a conceptualisation of 'representations of space' which suggests that theoretical representations tend towards collaboration with more profound and less easily represented processes of the kind with which he attempts to engage. Similar approaches can be found in both Jameson, with his appeal to a 'political unconscious' in literature, followed by a broader critique of postmodernism, and in Harvey. Harvey tends to aggressively force the question of whether complex but primarily rhetorical theories and dramatisations, conceived in relative isolation from attention to detailed empirical studies, are an adequate form of opposition to flows of socio-economic power. It can be claimed, though, that this is to move in the direction of imposing

too rigid a division between a material base and a cultural superstructure, or one between speech and action. This is a dubious strategy if one takes the view that economic systems and relations are as much a part of culture as any other aspect of human behaviour. The advantage of Harvey's approach is an attention to the details of economic trends and discourses. The disadvantage is his arguably rather crude notions of art and culture as things which can be tacked on to economic realities - an approach which, in some respects, seems to conform too readily with the prevailing, economics-dominated, dogma of the socio-spatial regime he attempts to critique and with whom he accuses others of collusion.

Other geographers have attempted somewhat more subtle approaches in this respect. Neil Smith's suggestion of a series of levels of socio-spatial organisation, from the body to the global is one example. Thrift and Leyshon's suggestion that the world of money and economics is highly sociable, and therefore strongly susceptible to social influence, is another. Here, Deleuze and Guattari's approach, which particularly focuses on connecting micro-elements to larger forms, is relevant. The emphasis on molecularities, local practices and minorities in relation to machines, planes of consistency, molarities and the like offers a subversion of capitalist social relations which focuses on tactical developments of differential tendencies already present but coordinated to the needs of the dominant culture. This is close to Lefebvre's emphasis on contradictory spaces but proceeds more

directly from a physics of action and movement than from a logic which tends towards the possibility of replacing one system with another.

Most of the approaches described can be characterised as ambitious mappings of socio-spatial relations which, as Lefebvre suggests, seek to provide different orientations to a dominant culture of accumulative capital without falling into the trap of providing an alternative which is more totalising and repressive than the cynical, relative openness of global capitalism. This approach has been characterised here as 'partial mapping', the premodifying adjective acknowledging that such mappings are neither complete nor impartial.

The fictional writing by Williams and Sinclair was explored in more detail as indicative of how certain forms of fiction can provide both partial mappings of this kind and a more accessible complement to comparable projects in the fields of poetry and cultural theory. *People of the Black Mountains*, like Williams's earlier novels, provides a sustained investigation and dramatisation of issues pertaining to place and to the other relations considered here - space, region and the earth. Williams's novels, as Tony Pinkney observes, deal with a particular area but usually in relation to influences well beyond it - amounting to an analysis of the truth of an international space. The space of Williams's 'border country' is, by definition, intermediary, falling between national boundaries and far from self-enclosed as region. In

*People of the Black Mountains* its relation to a space dominated by multinational capital is less obvious, partly because the third volume of the novel was not completed. At the same time, the relation to contemporary developments is maintained through Glyn's reflections. As in Sinclair's novels, places hold secreted pockets of history, but in Williams's novel these are presented as revealing themselves in less haptic, more chronologically ordered fashion. Williams provides a 'long history' comparable to Lefebvre's. Despite the evocation of all generations being suddenly present, the stories still form a chronological progression from one generation to another. If this appears a less radical approach to time-space relations than Sinclair's or Deleuze and Guattari's, it is one which has its own advantages. It tends to insist on the notion of history as coherent, the Hegelian aspect of Arran Gare's insistence on the importance to cultural regeneration of a sufficiently strong form of narrative, an attitude also supported by Harvey's perspective on the deficiencies of postmodernist thinking. In *People of the Black Mountains*, the region is provided with a history, a narrative, that incorporates events well before the advent of industrial capitalism, the Norman conquests, or even the Britons. Pretensions to cultural superiority over the values of the region are thus challenged by a longer perspective. The history and identity of the region is presented as one of struggle with a variety of forces, one of which is the arrogant aspect of incursions from the outside. Outsiders are not simply dismissed, but the length of the history outlined makes it difficult for them to gain the status of something overwhelmingly new. In this



sense generations really do stand side by side, since the narrative makes possible comparisons between different kinds of incursion. These are not simply rejected as a series of unjust attacks upon an innocent population, though there is a tendency to portray a development of modes of domination from the time of Dal Mered through to that of Conan, the last major intellectual portrayed.

There would seem to be common ground between Williams's approach and that of not only Lefebvre, but also de Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari. The primary criticism is of domination by violence, but that violence is shown to be far from simply physical and the systems and representations devised by intellectuals are shown to be a part of it. Lefebvre's critique of the representations of space, de Certeau's distrust of the scientific distancing of intellectual historians, Deleuze and Guattari's alternative line of nomadic thinking, are all comparable to William's defending of local, non-dominating traditions of thinking which are represented in the opening section in the contrast between Glyn's actual father, the professional historian Sayce, and his real father-figure, Elis, in whose footsteps he follows throughout the novel. This valuing of a more local and amateur form of thinking partly returns us to the question of secret and arcane forms of knowledge in relation to place. Williams rarely highlights the mysterious, a characteristic he shares with Deleuze and Guattari, who are friends of complexity but not of mystification. In both cases there is an acceptance that both kinds of knowledge, the state-professional

and the local-amateur are necessary, but it is the latter which is seen as having the greater need for defence and vindication. Williams's approach perhaps most closely resembles Lefebvre's in its picture of gradually developing forms of socio-spatial domination, though Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the Primitive, the Despotic and The Capitalist is not far removed from either. Williams's portrayal of a relatively early form of state domination in Menvandir is reminiscent of their insistence on the state always being present in form as well as the nomadic alternative to it, represented in the novel by lines of flight such as that taken by Dal Mered and other, comparable figures.

One of the problems of Williams's narrative is the degree to which it represents a potentially sentimental approach to the position of the non-metropolitan intellectual, seeking a retreat from the crowded competitiveness of the dominant central culture represented by London, Oxford and Cambridge. The same criticism might be applied to Olson and his retreat from mainstream politics into a radical intellectual alternative with strongly mystical elements. But, as discourses such as those of Deleuze and Guattari indicate, retreat and escape can be highly active and creative forms of movement. A greater problem with *People of the Black Mountains* is perhaps the lack of concession it makes to more conventional expectations on the part of the reader in terms of length, form and modality. It is not such an extreme work, in this respect, as *The Maximus Poems*, but in comparison to Williams's other novels, it does appear to offer new

forms of challenge. Multiplicity, repetition and variation are present on a scale comparable to those in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The reader has to cope with a multiplicitous narrative which is attentive to the significance of narrative in relation to other forms of cultural organisation and experience. As Dominic Head illustrates, most of these elements are available, in Graham Swift's *Waterland*. The most obvious difference, apart from the greater popularity of Swift's novel, is that the latter is shorter, deals with considerably fewer characters and storylines and retains a close contact with the domestic romance and murder story which are the staples of modern popular fiction. The perspective presented here is that these different kinds of novel should be viewed as points on a cline rather than as competing models for a new paradigm.

Similar points can be made in relation to Sinclair's *Downriver*, which, like *People of the Black Mountains*, seems to inhabit an area between *Waterland* and *The Maximus Poems* in terms of the specialised demands it makes on its potential reader. In Sinclair, relation to place as part of the human condition is explicitly selected and focused on from the beginning. As with Olson, the relation of human to cosmos is meditated upon via relations to the city or *polis*. Sinclair's choice of London as the centre of his attentions distinguishes him from both Olson and Williams. Their focus is on relatively small and knowable communities, immediately bordering on a natural landscape and well-removed from the power-centres of the nation. This is a choice which

encourages an identification with Wordsworth and his primarily positive and redemptive view of nature as potential paradise. Sinclair's choice of location connects him with a modern, French, urban tradition of the poetics of place. His gothic approach is common enough in urban literature but is not usually coupled with a specific attention to the notion of place as such rather than the condition of the city or metropolis. It is this aspect which helps to make it distinctive and allows for an approach to the city which connects it, and the modern socio-economic system of which it is a part, to an outside which is both geographical and historical. Place is presented as heavily used but still available ground, thick with history in the way that Sinclair's own narratives are full of allusions to those of other writers. London appears as a place that used to be the centre of everything but is increasingly the plaything of outside interests; a place where no one really understands what is happening - a site of disorientation.

The problem here, as with some aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's approach for writers such as Harvey or Gare, is the lack of an adequate political narrative to counter the negative features of dominant trends in social relations. Williams's approach in *People of the Black Mountains* provides a primary focus on and a clear, almost schematic, analysis of social and political problems and relations in the context of an alternative history of a particular area. Sinclair presents a more playful and exploratory approach, one which is not without its serious elements but which focuses on the fascination rather than the problems

of experience. In this respect there is a link with Deleuze and Guattari who are also less apt to produce a direct, highly co-ordinated, confrontational form of discourse in relation to oppressively dominant elements in the culture. The more anarchic approach of all of these writers clearly leaves them open to charges of a less organised and clearly focused politics but equally defends them from those of repression in the name of such an approach.

To conclude, an attempt has been made here to examine and compare ways in which aspects of the writing of a range of cultural theorists and two British novelists, have provided 'partial mappings' of issues pertaining to place, space, region and the earth. It has been suggested that in each case a relative broadness of scope combined with an actively disruptive or oppositional political element, are factors (seen as significantly shared with those elements of twentieth century poetry referred to) which might be viewed as part of a wider cultural movement in the struggle against disorientating and displacing tendencies in social relations dominated by the priorities of accumulative capital. Primary emphasis has been placed on a detailed examination of writing by the two novelists, since this has not yet received the degree of attention it merits, but the overall emphasis has been on the virtues of potential alliances, expressed as perceived convergences of approach, between otherwise considerably differing perspectives.

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