The lure of the local: landscape studies at the end of a troubled century

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We are living today on a threshold between a history of alienated displacement from and a longing for home and the possibility of a multicentered society that understands the reciprocal relationship between the two (Lippard, 1997: 20).

1 Whose streets? Whose world?

‘Our streets! Our world!’ So answered the amazing coalition of activists – labor, environmental, peace and justice, anti-genetically modified food, health, housing – gathered in Seattle in the waning weeks of the twentieth century to protest the (not-so-new) world order under construction by the World Trade Organization. Facing down tear gas and rubber bullets, no less than the condescending pronouncements of such tribunes of the global ruling class as The Economist or the The New York Times’ Thomas Friedman, activists were making a remarkable, and remarkably sophisticated, argument about the nature of ‘globalization’. So-called ‘free trade,’ they were saying, was a shibboleth for cementing elite control over the spaces of our lives, from city streets to nation-states, from the dinner table to the circuits of capital that span the globe. In response ‘Our streets! Our world!’ stood as a stark recognition that democratic control had to be actively grabbed and staunchly defended, but doing so would only be possible if democratic control of the streets of Seattle (or Dakar or Jakarta) was linked to democratic control over the globe itself – the patterns and reasons for trade, the parceling out of the burdens such trade inevitably brings with it, and the purposes behind the production and consumption of goods. This activist linking of the local to the global (and back again), while clearly a response to linkages already wrought on behalf of global capital, marks a significant advance over the old slogan of the 1970s:
‘Think globally, act locally.’ No longer is localism, no matter how contextualized, sufficient. Seattle showed that activism must simultaneously be engaged at multiple scales, linking location, region, nation-state and globe.

All this raises important questions for landscape studies at the end of the twentieth century, a century marked, like the nineteenth, by the constant revolutionizing of the means of production and communication, marked by the fashioning of both a world market and a globally connected resistance to the ravages of that market. A global world has indeed been forged, but it is one that is sharply uneven in its distribution of costs and benefits and deeply unjust in its parceling out of riches. The making of this global world has not been particularly pleasant. The twentieth was a century, for all its technological advances, of constant and frequently total war; a century that saw direct colonial administration over the majority of the land surface and peoples give way to a neocolonialist imperialism, now advanced under the title ‘globalization,’ that (all these wars notwithstanding) was just as ruthless in its deployment of the ‘dull compulsion of economic necessity’ as was the old order in its deployment of troops; and a century of frequent, and frequently betrayed, revolutions, struggles large and small to forge a different way of living than that dictated by global capitalism and its attendant geopolitics. And yet, in the midst of all this turmoil, until remarkably recently, geographical landscape studies have remained resolutely localist, resolutely ‘apolitical’, resolutely idiosyncratic (and often archaic) in interest and focus. The ‘lure of the local’, in Lucy Lippard’s (1997) evocative phrase, has been powerful indeed, and many in cultural geography have taken this for strength and steadiness of purpose rather than for the weakness that it is.

There are, however, encouraging signs, and within the past two decades some of the building blocks of a theory equal to the world we live in have begun to be assembled. From Cosgrove’s (1984 [1998]; 1985) important archaeology of landscape’s roots in the emergence of capitalism to Daniels’ (1993) and Matless’s (1998) studies of the link between landscape and national identity; from Henderson’s (1999) theories about the relationship between the circulation of capital and the making of landscapes and landscape representation in California to Katz’s (1998) concerns about the privatization of space and nature; from Olwig’s (1996) arguments about the relationship between landscape and social justice in modernizing Europe to Zukin’s (1991) similar arguments about the nature of the landscape in the urban northeastern USA; from Rose’s (1993) and Nash’s (1996) differently inflected insistence that there can be feminist theories of landscape, to Walker’s (1995) and Domosh’s (1996) differently inflected arguments about the transformation of built environments; from Blomley’s (1998; 1999) insistence that law and property are integral to the production of landscapes, to a new-found focus on the relationship between labor and landscape, the ‘local’ and even the ‘idiosyncratic’ (and archaic) are beginning to be directly tied to the ‘global’ and to processes of modernization – and they are being done so in a manner that is as resolutely political as older work tried to be apolitical.

The questions asked in Seattle about whose streets and whose world we live in – and how we know and can change that world – must become the defining agenda of landscape studies as we enter a new century. Whatever lure the local may hold for landscape geographers it must become one of understanding how particular places, particular landscapes fit into a larger, scalarly complex mosaic of landscapes that themselves are never ‘naively given’, as Sauer (1925) once suggested. Instead they are
actively produced and struggled over, and it is the politics of production and struggle that ought to engage landscape studies. Making sure that these become our streets and our world means coming to terms with the lure of the local – with understanding how we both live in and always transcend the politics of place. The troubled legacy of the twentieth century demands at least that much.

II The lure of the local

Such is the message of the little-noticed (within geography), but quite important, book by the art critic Lucy Lippard: *The lure of the local: senses of place in a multicentered society.*\(^2\) Her target is not just geographers, of course, but also artists, cultural studies practitioners, art critics and funders, and others with a stake in the politics of landscape and representation. Published in 1997, *The lure of the local* is at once a deeply personal book and one of wide implication for landscape studies. Lippard draws, in the first instance, on such geographers and fellow travelers as Cosgrove, J.B. Jackson, Yi-Fu Tuan, Neil Smith and Rebecca Solnit to construct a subtle theory of landscape that links local place to both global process and the politics of representation through which that place is known, understood and circulated ‘abroad’. *The lure of the local* comprises three parallel stories. The main text explores such topics as the function of maps in defining place and landscape, the planning (and overplanning) of public space, environmental justice and controversies over public art. Lippard’s point is, in part, that what links these issues is struggle over and in the ‘landscape’. For Lippard, the landscape is at once home and the site of struggle; at once embedded in place and constructed and reconstructed by forces larger than itself; both the site of progressive political action, and the site for recidivist, even revanchist (Smith, 1996) yearnings.

To illustrate, Lippard offers a second story. Across the top of each page is a much more personal narrative: a close study of a small cottage and community on the coast of Maine that has been Lippard’s summer home since she was a girl in the 1930s. Here Lippard explores how people live in place and how they can do so in a way that exemplifies what Massey (1994) calls a ‘progressive sense of place’. But Lippard also explores the difficulties that arise when one tries to find a home in a multicentered society, and struggles both to respect local difference and to protest its provincialism, its racism, its ethnocentrism. For Lippard, art provides a means to negotiate these tensions – to explicate them and to transcend them. And so finally, *The lure of the local* offers an essay – or hundreds of little essays – on art and its connection to land, place and space. On most pages are illustrations of artworks, mostly from around the USA, sometimes community based, sometimes the inspiration of artistic carpet-baggers, always political in and of themselves, and usually wrapped up in complex political debates within the communities of which they are part. For each, Lippard provides a long caption that explores some of the complex issues raised by the artwork.

In the interplay between these three essays, ‘landscape’ emerges in Lippard’s account as a complex material and ideological entity, one that is never stable (though often quite resistant to change), never the purveyor of a single meaning (though also not open to just any definition), never solely the property of any individual (though clearly the product of relations of power, property and control). For Lippard, the ‘lure of the local’, is no simple nostalgia for a more place-based existence, a deeper sense of community,
or a stronger link with the land and environment (though all these are important). Rather it is a complex emotional-political argument about the status of the local in a complex society. The goal for Lippard, like the goal for the activists in Seattle, is to find a way to create a **multicentered** society, in which **control** over the places in which we live our lives is likewise **multicentered** and **democratic**. ‘To read a landscape in the geographical sense,’ Lippard (1997: 287) concludes, ‘is to read its history in land forms and built structures, behind which lie the stories of the people who made that history, which in most cases can only be guessed at.’ This is our world and these are our streets, but they are also someone else’s property: landscape is a relationship of alienation and the history Lippard seeks to guess at is one of how that alienation is constructed, how it is contested, and how – sometimes – it is transcended (cf. Olwig, 1996).

And yet we can – and we do – do more than just guess about this history, as recent work in landscape attests. Rather, we have begun to develop specific and important tools, insightful theoretical foci and clear political agenda for landscape studies. Using some of the themes apparent in *Lure of the local*, I would like to use the remainder of this essay to explore those tools, foci and agenda as it has been expressed in geography within the last few years.³

### III Scale

The title of Lippard’s book hints at one of the key areas of recent landscape work: the attempt to situate the production and representation of landscape within a more supple politics of scale (on scale, see Herod, 1991; Smith, 1993; Crump and Merrett, 1998). Lippard’s title is intentionally double-edged: the ‘local’ is a siren song, a seeming retreat from the hectic world of the modern, and yet still only a lure, ready to hook the unwary. The local is a ‘lure’ in another sense: it is a field for the accumulation of capital, even as it is a fetter to that same accumulation, as Jeff Crump (1999) argues in his exploration of the tension between global economic restructuring and the redevelopment of landscape in Moline, Illinois. Crump shows how during a period of deindustrialization the local landscape was reconstructed to tell a story of ‘capitalist heroism’ in a manner presumed to be appealing to in-migrants, tourists and footloose capital. And yet such a story also had the (largely intended) effect of erasing the history of working-class life and struggle. Crump’s story of Moline is not particularly unusual, but it is an important one. It shows how the lure of the local is more and more directed toward capital, seeking to lure it to the local, in hopes of staving off total decline for at least a little while longer.

This is quite a different sort of local lure than that which Lippard hopes to promote; but it is one that must always be set against her version: local control is often limited to arguments over just which aspects of the landscape will be most attractive to capital. And as Jan Nijman (1999) has shown in an analysis of the tourist transformation of central Amsterdam through globalized tourism, the ‘capital’ that places need to lure in is often itself highly fragmented, walking around, for example, in the pockets of fickle tourists, whose every whim, it seems, now often dictates just how local landscapes are to be redeveloped – and who is to be squeezed out, to find that these are no longer their streets or their world (McCann, 1999).

The complex politics of scale work in a different way in George Henderson’s account of the development and representation of the California landscape: *California and the
While one of Henderson’s key interests is in how the antinomies of the California landscape were represented within regional literature around the turn of the twentieth century, he is also keenly interested in constructing a theory of regional landscape development. Henderson therefore develops a complex, compelling and exciting theory of landscape production based on the changing geography of capital circulation— the invention of branch-banking, the circulation of capital through the racially marked bodies of laborers, and the development of scalarly complex systems of distribution and marketing of crops. Henderson presents the best account available of the ways that landscapes get constructed as various problems facing capitalists—capitalists working at every scale from their own bodies as farmers and bankers, to the world of global markets— are solved not in theory, but in the gritty practice of trying to get a crop to grow in the ground, and sold in the market.

Finally, scale is a central theme in Herod’s (1998) edited collection, Organizing the landscape. Herod uses this book to announce the coming of a new ‘labor geography’ that rewrites both labor history by putting space and place at the center, and political economic approaches to geography by assuring that labor and laborers are given serious theoretical and empirical attention. As Herod (1998: 5) argues, the focus of labor geography needs to be ‘how workers actively mold and shape spatial relations and landscape as an integral part of their political praxis and as a source of political power’. Similarly, work needs to be done on how spatial relations and landscapes can simultaneously be a means for hemming in that power, for subverting it or for undermining it. Despite the title, however, landscape remains something of a step-child in Organizing the landscape, never really being addressed in any systematic way. There is still plenty of work to be done, in other words, in figuring out just how ‘workers actively mold and shape the landscape’. Crump’s (1999) story of Moline suggests that worker power might in fact be quite limited; capital’s superior spatial mobility has seen to the erasure of work and workers from the landscape. Can counterexamples be offered?

IV Private property and . . .

Whatever the answer to that last question, it is clear that it cannot be given outside an understanding of how landscape is linked to property. The relationship between property and landscape loomed fairly large in Cosgrove’s (1984) reconstruction of the landscape concept. In his estimation, the commodification of space as a certain kind of bourgeois property was central to the ‘landscape way of seeing’. And property certainly figures—sub rosa at least— in the myriad discussions of landscape and national identity that were produced in the 1990s (see, for example, Daniel’s, 1993, account of the relations between public and private property or Helsinger’s, 1994, arguments about how private estates were conflated with national landscapes). But beyond Cosgrove’s initial arguments, property’s relationship to landscape has not been particularly well theorized within geography.

Against this trend, Nick Blomley (1996; 1997; 1998) has begun an ambitious project exploring the geography of property, a project in which landscape is central. In the first place, property, like landscape, is a form of representation (Blomley, 1998: 573). It is also, again like landscape, a set of lived relationships, given material form. And thus, finally, property, like landscape, ‘is a site for a struggle that is simultaneously material and rep-
resentational’. Property, Blomley (1999) has even more recently argued, is held in place by violence: both the violence of the state that guarantees private interests, and the violence of those who contest such interests. As the protesters in Seattle were at pains to make clear, their protests were precisely about property: whose streets, whose world? The question that the relationship between landscape and property raises is one of rights. Who has the right to ownership? How are those rights limited? What of competing claims? For Blomley (1998: 580), conflicts over property rights require that geographers begin the work of understanding ‘alternative landscapes of property [that are] consciously grounded in local lived experience’. This then links Blomley’s project to Lippard’s, for she too is interested in the degree to which claims to private property are limited by collective, often local, experience. For both authors, the complicity between landscape and property is best seen in struggles over gentrification and redevelopment, struggles that arise when profit rises above people in the claim for space. Both landscape and property exist – are made possible by – a contradictory tension between ground that is ‘commodified and alienable [and ground that is] charged with meaning and validated through use and struggle’ (Blomley, 1998: 584). The question is how private property becomes a ‘public landscape’. Exploring that question – especially in the wake of Seattle – should be a primary goal for landscape geographers (cf. Mitchell, 1997).

V . . . the public landscape

Nowhere is it more interesting to explore the relationship between private property and the public landscape than in the shopping mall. Jon Goss (1999) has thus continued his ongoing exploration of the mall (Goss, 1993; 1996) by turning his attention to the mega Mall of America. Goss argues that a landscape like the mall – dedicated to the commodification of everything – brings with it a complex politics of identity in which questions of ‘authenticity’ (and hence alienation) are in fact exactly the wrong ones. Goss’s argument – about the way that the goal of a landscape like the Mall of America is to instill a memento of not some ‘real’ (other) experience ‘but a memento of retail experience’ itself – is important (Goss, 1999: 70). The total landscape is given over to the totalizing ambitions of commodity production; there is, as Debord (1994: 29) has asserted, nothing but the commodity anymore: ‘commodities are now all that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity.’ The mall is a landscape dedicated to naturalizing this world, to making us feel at home in it, and to making us, as Goss (1999) argues, not just comfortable with the world the commodity makes, but desirous of it. While commodity consumption at the Mall of America is a deeply individualizing experience, it is performed as part of a collective – a collective of shoppers, no doubt, but a collective nonetheless. For that reason, the tropes and spaces that Goss analyzes work so as to infect the personal with the public, creating new kinds of experience that are not simply nostalgic (though they are that), but which simply are. The Mall of the America, privately owned and carefully controlled, is a particular kind of public space, one, I would argue, that now best represents dominant society: ‘the imagined totality of the geography and history of the consumer world’, as Goss (1999: 45) puts it. Who owns the landscape – the ‘streets’ and the ‘world’ of the mall – remains vitally important, even if through our consumption we can always own (a carefully
scripted) part of this world, the experience of these streets.

If Goss raises questions of the nature of public, collective life in a private space, then questions of a different sort about the public landscape are raised in the transitional cities and states of the former Soviet Union as new property relations are developed under the rubric of ‘marketization’. But these are still questions about the ownership of the landscape, still questions about ‘whose streets, whose world’. James Bell (1999), for example, has traced the shifting geography of national identity in Tashkent as it has been inscribed in what he calls the ‘official public landscape’. This landscape is marked by street renamings, monument building and dismantling and has, perhaps not oddly, remained the domain of elites. Whether during the Soviet or the post-Soviet era, the tension in the streets is mostly one of differing visions of national space held by ‘conservative political elites and more radical cultural elites’ (Bell, 1999: 187). In Tashkent, the most prominent icons of the Soviet era have been systematically dismantled rather than popularly toppled. Lenin simply disappeared in the middle of the night, leaving only an empty pedestal to mark the spot where he had once watched over the city. The official public landscape was transformed with remarkably little public participation.

By contrast, Taiwan’s uneasy embrace of multiparty democracy has led to quite public struggles over who has control over the streets of Taipei, as Leitner and Kang (1999) report. As they show, the street names of Taipei are keen representations of Chinese nationalist yearnings for the mainland: a map of street names reveals a conscious strategy for representing mainland geography in the public landscape of Taiwan. Streets in the northern districts represent northern regions of China, those in the southwest represent the southwest, and so forth. When the Democratic Progressive Party, factions of which advocate independence for Taiwan, recommended renaming parts of the streetscape, and at the same time painted a whale (representing Taiwan as an independent oceanic state) on the street in front of its campaign office, a huge row developed over nationalist iconography in the city: the landscape became a surrogate for long-simmering, but frequently repressed, arguments about the nature of Taiwanese sovereignty. One important result was the renaming of a street after the indigenous Ketagalan people, one of the first overt admissions that Taiwan has a ‘non-Chinese’ history that must be reckoned with.

The nature of public and private space, public and private property, public and private landscapes – in short the question of ownership over space and identity – thus became a keen area of research for geographers in the waning years of the twentieth century. To put that another way, landscape and identity are inseparable from property – whether that property is public or private. The lure of the local in this case is the lure of control, the lure of being able to stake a claim in a particular locale and declare to one and all just who you are. This is why the Ketagalan worked hard to see themselves represented in the Taiwanese landscape; and it is why elites in Tashkent seek to maintain close control over the process of iconic landscape transformation: to lose the landscape is to lose the right to define identity in the landscape (cf. Till, 1999).

VI  Creating identity: narrative and authenticity

Bell, like many others studying iconic landscapes, focuses on elites. Leitner and Kang, again like many others, explore the politics behind the production of particular
lands. Goss makes strong claims for the importance of fieldwork and ‘expert’ insight into landscape form and function. Much less well studied – perhaps because methodologically so much more difficult – is the way landscapes are received, understood and used by ordinary people. Lippard’s personal narrative – the one running across the top of the pages of *Lure of the local* – is one approach to getting at the politics of reception and understanding. Lippard (1997: 33, quotation unattributed) begins from the argument that ‘every landscape is a hermetic narrative: “finding a fitting place for oneself in the world is finding a place for oneself in a story”.’ The trick then is to see how people weave stories into and out of place so as to construct identities. Such a goal, according to Dydia DeLysers (1999: 604), does not necessarily imply a focus on ‘texts’. Indeed, DeLysers argues that ‘text-based or archival works’ can be usefully supplemented by participant observation and ethnographic work. Her study of visitor interactions in the preserved western ‘ghost town’ of Bodie, California, stands as a fine example of the way that people insert themselves into stories and landscapes, reworking mythologies of place and past to their own ends. For DeLysers, the key questions are thus, ‘How does Bodie’s landscape lead visitors to assess authenticity? What does it mean to say visitors and staff do consider Bodie authentic? How does accepting Bodie’s authenticity enable visitors to engage with narratives about the past, and what do those narratives evoke?’ (DeLysers, 1999: 623; these questions have also been asked recently with considerable force by Hoelschers, 1998a; 1998b; 1998c). As DeLysers goes on to argue, while these are indeed important questions, they are not innocent, and they cannot be asked outside the cultural history of which they are a part. In the history of the American West, that cultural history is one of white conquest and Native American and Hispanic dispossession, severe harassment of Asian immigrants, environmental despoilation and a deeply buried history of women that rarely seems to surface in the heroic myths that define the region. The narratives that Bodie helps authorize are deeply exclusionary:

The narratives of the mythic West, of Anglo American virtues, and of progress [that Bodie encourages] verify a patriarchal middle-class, Anglo American construction of American culture, values, and morals. In other words, what the majority of Bodie’s visitors and staff find in Bodie is a place that confirms their already-held beliefs in the dominant American culture (DeLysers, 1999: 623–24).

The lure of the local might be precisely that it allows for an exclusionary complacency: these really are our streets; this is our world – and not yours.

The landscape is thus inescapably political, and new meanings, through appropriation and struggle, can be developed, as Brian Osborne (1998) has made clear in a compelling study of the George Etienne Cartier monument in Montreal. In Osborne’s analysis, landscape studies come into close contact with the burgeoning set of researches on the politics of public space (e.g., Staehehi and Thompson, 1997; Domosh, 1998; Fyfe, 1998; Goheen, 1998; Light and Smith, 1998), which seeks to explore the role of space in democratic or other political systems, the importance of privatization and the way that control and order are spatial practices. For Osborne (1998: 452), an iconic landscape can become ‘a ritualized place of performance and social congress’ that may best be interpreted, in the case of the Cartier monument, as ‘a reflection of the values of a world of late capitalism and represents a new theatre of public resistance to homogenization and domination’. The key word, as DeLysers shows, is *may*: there is nothing
necessary about the use and meaning of landscapes: those are always questions of power.

Of course, this issue has been the main thrust of landscape studies for two decades now, but it is a point always worth reiterating, especially when explored with such deep empirical detail as that provided by DeLyser and Osborne. The difference between Osborne’s and DeLyser’s findings – the landscape as a site of contest in one case, and the landscape as a site for the affirmation of dominant narratives of identity, in the other – points to the always constructed nature of identity itself. Indeed, the relationship between local landscape and national identity remains a strong area of interest for geographers (e.g., Brace, 1999). Matless’s (1998) monograph on Landscape and Englishness explores this relationship in great (twentieth-century) historical depth. Matless (1998: 12) argues that ‘the question of what landscape “is” or “means” can always be subsumed in the question of how it works; as a vehicle of social and self identity, as a site for the claming of cultural authority, as the generator of profit, as a space for different kinds of living’. The landscape’s meanings as well as its functions are a site for the reconstruction of ‘citizenship’, a project about which Matless remains quite uneasy. As Matless knows – and shows – forging too close a link between citizenship and landscape, in England no less than Germany, is a dangerous, often racist, project. The lure of the local is not just the lure of myths through which people make sense of their own lives, but the lure of mythologies through which power is consolidated and solidified, and the project of racism advanced. Indeed, Atkinson (1998; Atkinson and Cosgrove, 1998) reminds us that ‘ownership’ of streets and iconic landscapes is often an explicitly fascist project. It must be remembered, therefore, that racist longing in England or Italy (or America, France or anywhere else) is no more nor less ‘authentic’ than the perhaps a bit more innocent stories tourists to Bodie fabricate for themselves when exploring a carefully reconstructed ghost town. While Nuala Johnson (1999) shows that it is indeed possible to construct a heritage experience that veers toward the inclusive rather than the exclusive, such a project is neither easy, nor necessarily in the best interest of the public and private funders behind heritage landscapes.

What then are we to make of the story of Jun Mingyu? Jun is the hero – or perhaps the anti-hero – of Tim Oakes’s (1999) exploration of the politics of food, place, tourism and landscape in Guizhou Province, China. For Jun, not only tradition and propriety, but also the ability to make a pile of yuan hinged on his ability to transform the canyon landscape of his hometown into a tourist destination. This meant ‘cooking’ the landscape into a delicious feast that was ‘authentically traditional’ – authentically traditional, that is, in the language and tastes of ‘downstream’ culture, and thus quite opposite many of the desires of other villagers (most of whom were traditionally marginalized members of the Ge and Miao peoples, who, Jun asserted, ‘have no culture’ – Oakes, 1999: 140). For Jun, no less than for the Ge and Maio, ‘the dreams of tourism’ – in which the landscape plays a vital role – ‘are dreams of achieving modernity, security, and wealth’ (Oakes, 1999: 142). The lure of the local in this case is not that it staves off transformative modernity (as perhaps both the identity affirmation morality plays enacted in the English countryside and Bodie do), but that it ushers it in. For Jun like the Ge and the Miao, ‘authenticity’ demands modernity, more so than it demands nostalgia. The local is a means of achieving control, of securing a future. Whose streets and whose world? Jun might well give a very different answer from tourists at a great
house in Ireland, visitors to ghost towns in California, walkers in the hills of England – or protesters in Seattle.

VII Conclusion: local theory (is not enough)

‘Like nature, culture, and its glamorous sibling global, local is one of those compromised words our language will not relinquish.’ So begins the anthropologist Hugh Raffles’s (1999: 323) exploration of the link between the local and the global as it structures landscape in Amazonia. For Raffles, drawing on geographic landscape theory, this means paying more careful attention to ‘local theory’. What then of ‘globalization’? What then of the protests in Seattle with which the century ended? For Lippard (1997) part of what is at stake is the question of how a multicentered world can be wrested from the control of multinational corporations to assure a certain local legitimacy to the projects of home and place. For Raffles what is at stake is the issue of how different groups can maintain control over locality. ‘Locality . . . should not be confused with location,’ Raffles (1999: 325) avers. Rather, ‘locality’ needs to be understood as ‘highly mobile’ since ‘places travel with the people through whom they are located’. Raffles thus approvingly cites Margaret Rodman’s (1992) argument that we need to focus our energies on understanding (in Raffle’s, 1999: 329, words) ‘more or less individual, overlapping “social landscapes”, an idea that emphasizes the anthropogenic prefiguredness of the ecological context in which people live’. Raffles may not be wrong, but such a local, individualizing theory seems to miss the point of much of the geographical research on landscape that he also approvingly quotes, namely, the degree to which landscape is in fact fixed in place, relatively stable and solid, of real material force (a point that Raffles later concedes: p. 339). This then is the limit to the lure of the local, and to ‘local theory’ like that which Raffles seeks to promote. As the demonstrations in Seattle made so clear, it may simply not matter how much ‘place’ travels with people, when their movement is not self-determined but set in motion by the alienating processes of capital run amok, when the landscapes they travel through are property, or when their experiences are carefully scripted in the marketing departments of company, parks conservancy and national parks authority alike.

Local theory – the lure of the local – is not enough. If the twentieth century opened with both Lenin and Mackinder worrying about the end of absolute geographical expansion as the driving force of geopolitical and geoeconomic change, both differently seeking to intuit what a world of uneven development in relative space might look like (see Smith, 1990), and if the history of the twentieth century, the history of war and genocide, capitalist expansion and socialist retreat, radical technological advance and continued immiseration for so many, can indeed be understood (at the most general level) as the material construction of this uneven global world, then perhaps the protest in Seattle, linked to similar struggles from the Zapatistas in Mexico to the successful global campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investments, can be seen as the stirring of a movement seeking to reclaim popular, rather than corporate or state, control over the social production of space, place and landscape. Current geographical landscape research, with its focus on scale, the politics of alienation and authenticity, and with a growing interest in the link between property and the landscape, is well poised to show why it is important to make these our streets and our world. The task for
landscape theory at the start of this century is to find the language with which to understand just how such a process of appropriation must be at once local and global: for any landscape is always both. Local theory, within landscape studies as on the streets of Seattle, must give way to scale-theory. Otherwise the landscapes of Jun in Guizhou will seem a world away from those of Montreal punks expropriating the Cartier monument or shoppers in the Mall of America. And, as I think landscape studies are showing in particularly compelling ways, they’re not. A multicentered world, as Lippard makes clear, must be one that is not localist, but fully reciprocal. So must our theories of landscape. That is the challenge posed by the world that confronts us at the close of the troubled twentieth century.

Notes

1. See, for example, the recollections of J.B. Jackson’s life, work and influence on geography published as a special issue of Geographical Review, Vol. 88, no. 4.
2. Lippard’s book is a good indication of the degree to which geographical ideas about landscape (and related issues) have penetrated other areas of social and scholarly commentary. In the interests of full disclosure, I should say that Lippard was exposed to some of the literature on landscape in geography when she audited a course on landscape that I taught at the University of Colorado. It is quite clear, however, that my syllabus provided only a stepping stone: Lippard’s argument and her development of geographers’ work are fully her own – and fully compelling.
3. I am not putting specific dates on this review for two reasons. In the first place, my predecessor, Kent Mathewson, quite recently and thoroughly updated the readers of this journal on work in cultural landscapes and cultural ecology, including a number of studies published as late as 1999. Secondly, in my first ‘progress report’ I am (quite without permission!) taking the opportunity to explore, while focusing mostly on works published in the past few years, what I see as the key themes of landscape studies that have developed, and need further development, in geography as we enter the twenty-first century. My goal is not to survey the universe of landscape writing in some given period; it is to highlight key trends, key arguments, and to make some normative claims on the field. I should therefore point out that I do not address the cultural ecology literature in this essay. This is largely because I am not competent to do so; it is a literature that I do not know very well, and I do not feel qualified in commenting on it.
4. Lippard’s approach is remarkably dissimilar from that of J.B. Jackson. Where Lippard’s concern is to convey her own experiences as ones that perhaps others can resonate with, Jackson was always concerned to speak for ‘everyman’ – without, as Limerick (1998) shows, spending much time finding out what others think, feel or know. While Jackson’s insights were frequently compelling and often prescient (see the essays by Wright, 1998, and Horowitz, 1998), his approach was one of unsupported, and often contradictory, assertion (Limerick, 1998), no matter how erudite (Groth, 1998), or ‘from the heart’ (Starrs, 1998). His goal in other words was not resonance with others’ experience, but defining and not infrequently seeking to dominate that experience. Groth (1998: iii) suggests that ‘geography was a perfect [academic home] for Jackson, who by temperament was always an outsider looking in’. While this confirms my own sense of Jackson and his relationship to the vernacular and everyday landscape, I hope it is now a poor description of geography in general and landscape studies in particular; it is certainly a universe away from the position that Lippard works to develop.

References


McCann, E. 1999: Race, protest and public space; contextualizing Lefebvre in the US city. Antipode 31, 163–84.


