



Dwelling in Political Landscapes

Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives

Edited by

Anu Lounela, Eeva Berglund and Timo Kallinen

Studia Fennica
Anthropologica 4

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Landscape is not what it used to be: Anthropology and the politics of environmental change

Our epoch is one of significant shifts in how relations among societies and natures are formed, maintained and lived. We suggest that new anthropological perspectives on landscape have great potential to address the resulting conundrums. People all over the globe are experiencing new hazards and unprecedented situations as their environments change at speeds never before experienced. Massive species loss is just one transformation affecting life forms and their interactions, climate change another, and there are many more rapid and sometimes profound material and social changes that anthropologists working around the world attend to and document. That said, alongside these changes, there are also significant continuities.

Through exploring how the material and conceptual are entangled in and as landscapes, this book takes up the invitation posed by such emerging situations, to open up the potentials in anthropology and related fields, for understanding life when ‘things are not what they used to be’. Complex entanglements of seemingly disconnected processes and the recent sense of crisis concerning environment, movements of people, climate change and other planetary transformations, raise questions over the role of anthropology and about appropriate methodologies for studying these developments.

The book’s origins are in the Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society ‘Landscapes, Sociality and Materiality’ (2015)¹ much of which touched upon questions of how materialities and social

1 The Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society 2015, ‘Landscapes, sociality and materiality’ was held in Helsinki in October, 2015. Katja Uusihakala and Anu Lounela acted as the principal organisers, but Jenni Mölkänen, Tuomas Tammisto and Heikki Wilenius contributed just as importantly in conceptualising and organising the event. The conference sought to discuss how the concept of landscape works as a tool of anthropological inquiry when we are looking at how forms of materiality and sociality connect in the production of places and spaces. The fifteen panels covered a wide range of topics such as multispecies ethnography and the Anthropocene, memory, sacred landscapes, globalisation, politics of nature and urban landscape, and more.

formations are entangled in the production of specific landscapes. During the conference, it turned out that many anthropologists are adopting and adapting Tim Ingold's work, which offers promising ways to make sense of ethnographic encounters in places where novel human and nonhuman configurations are emerging. Particularly, the dwelling perspective, which Ingold has developed in many texts (e.g. Ingold 2000), points to environments as outcomes of continuous human and nonhuman entanglements. He conceives landscapes as moments in constantly shifting relations of dwelling, where dwelling is understood as immersion in the flow of life in general. Importantly for Ingold, humans are like all animals in that they develop in movement and action, simultaneously sensing and impacting on their surroundings as they do so, even if this is denied by the conventions of modern (Western) thought (2000: 186). From such ingredients, Ingold has built up a highly influential anthropology of nature, which foregrounds landscapes as something that humans produce, and in which they actively participate, even as landscapes furnish us with both the material resources and meanings we need to survive. Landscape thus understood is neither social nor natural but *sociornatural*.

However, as many authors of the book note, this phenomenological approach offers few tools to analyse how profound transformations in landscapes alter meanings and value relations. Thus, there seem to be limits to how far we can go with this approach and its privileging of the sensory. When new and old configurations of political power are transforming places and experiences of landscapes, even having effects on intimate knowledge people gain when they move within them, Ingold's broadly phenomenological contribution feels insufficient and risks appearing apolitical.

Noticing this gap and the emergence of rapid environmental changes around the globe, the book discusses human and nonhuman entanglements mostly within transformed landscapes. As it is, all humans today live in global as well as local situations wherein, following the 1970s post-gold, free market era and the financial crisis of 2008, economic policies and conditions have resulted in the increasing intensification of capitalism, neoliberalisation and a growing gap between the poor and rich, as well as new polarisations between divergent worldviews and practices (Gregory 1997; Ortner 2016). Increasingly, large-scale projects are transforming material flows and inter-species relations, in processes that extend even to previously intimate landscapes, while in some places, even access to land has become severely restricted. 'Land grabbing' by private corporations, conservation organisations or states, whether to gain wealth or gain power, has become a focus of scholarly interest too. There is a long history of connections between competition for land and processes of wealth accumulation, even in places where rights to land have been characteristically overlapping rather than exclusive (Polanyi 1944; Peluso and Watts 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2006), but our contributors suggest that land grabbing should be understood as more than a territorial issue (see also Árnason et al. 2012). What is increasingly at issue are landscapes as meaningful social and material entanglements and relations extending to spirits, ancestors, winds, daylight and so on. In the examples in the chapters, landscapes are often forms of

remembrance of past generations; tampering with them can equal collective violence.

These developments take place not only in the Global South, but also in the North, and they touch upon people anywhere, rural, urban and other. In some parts of the globe, rural landscapes are transformed as people migrate out, emptying the landscape especially of young people. As immigrants head for the cities, these come under pressure from overcrowding and from capital as it materialises in ever larger building projects. The connections between these geographically distant processes have become important also for anthropological landscape research, with one result being that the concept of landscape has been freed of its usually rural co-ordinates: the term is equally fruitful for the study of urban life and its dynamics. A composite or configuration of features of different kinds, landscape as concept connects different spatial processes and so helps make visible links between places – and indeed landscapes – separated by distance, such as unsustainable resource extraction in one place and seemingly unstoppable acceleration of urbanisation in another. When it comes to changing urban landscapes, generalising across the globe is foolhardy, but it is fair to say that cities everywhere increasingly feature commodity-led transnational imagery and offer homogenised experiences (Julier 2008; Easterling 2016). But if dispossession and dislocation follow, so does collective creativity that results in renewed landscapes. Efforts to create meaningful futures still produce places to dwell, in auto-constructed favelas or displaced persons' camps as much as in more middle-class projects (Immonen, Berglund, this volume). So in cities too, movement and landscape go together, with mobility and connectivity articulating inequality and its production. This more dynamic approach, which does not reduce cities to nodes in some larger network, knits together urban and rural or non-urban processes, and it complements the more holistic and notionally apolitical emphasis on dwelling (McFarlane 2011). Undoubtedly modern cities are very much the products of the need for movement and rhythmic patterns of coming and going established by industrial systems of labour, as Ingold has argued (2000: 323–338). But despite such urban experiences usually being presented as alienating and therefore not really 'dwelling', anthropologists know that cities are also places of dwelling.

Wherever changes in the surroundings and conditions of life are relevant to people, they constitute 'environmental issues' that go well beyond what that meant in twentieth-century debate. If that focussed on the relationship between human activity and healthy bio or ecosystems, or parts of them (Harvey 1993: 2), in current struggles brought about by broadly neoliberal place-politics, people create counter movements and alternative forms of knowledge. These may manifest in muted ways, such as humour or quiet resistance (Plaan, this volume), but may also lead to producing maps that seek to show – with mixed success and contradictory results – socially valued features that official representations overlook (Peluso 2012; Lounela, this volume). These movements may target the state or business, or even challenge a social order based on economic growth (Berglund, this volume), but they may also target social groups and foster racist or nationalist

discourses that completely disavow the histories of today's environments, shaped as they are, by powers close by and far away.

Furthermore, climate-related environmental hazards such as floods, fires and droughts have intensified in recent years, affecting landscapes in many novel ways. While we were writing this chapter in the summer of 2018, fires destroyed large areas of forest in Sweden, and weeks of soaring temperatures put climate onto the public agenda across the Northern hemisphere as never before. Fires and floods, draughts and other extreme weather conditions have for a long time taken place in the Global South, as anthropologists know, but in the most parts of the wealthy North it was easy, until recently, to belittle such things. Now sensory experience, gatherings of different beings and marks of memorable pasts – landscapes in fact – are increasingly understood as not the same as they used to be.

With such unprecedented transformations under way, landscape studies have extended to what some anthropologists have called "anthropology on the edge" (Hastrup 2014) with the suggestion that researchers should search for new methods. Doing fieldwork around the world has for some time brought anthropology closer with dramatic landscape transformation and drawn attention to how spaces of consumption get constructed in one place while extraction and exploitation change worlds elsewhere. A focus on this darker side of global social life is not new in anthropology, as Sherry Ortner spelled out in her historical survey of anthropology's encounters with the "problematic conditions of the real world under neoliberalism" (2016: 50), conditions that some disciplines fail to spot let alone analyse. At play are systemic landscape-altering dynamics, including "the removal of government regulations on business; the reduction of the power of labor to make demands; the downsizing of the labor force itself; the privatization of many public goods and institutions; and the radical reduction of programs of social assistance for poor people" (*ibid.*: 52). Many of the authors here also point at the 'dark side' of the capitalist processes that affect landscapes and change lives. Drawing from the conference panels, their texts push the anthropological study of landscapes in different ways: combining social and natural sciences to examine materialities and socialities in 'disturbed landscapes'; considering movements of people, non-human and other agents; touching on climate change and multispecies anthropology; problematising how rapid change impacts on identities; engaging with sacred and ritual spaces in the making of meaningful landscapes. First, however, we review how anthropology has thus far broached the topic.

Landscape studies: Politics and experiences

Interest in landscape studies has grown among anthropologists especially since the 1990s. Prior to that, landscape featured in the ecological anthropology or cultural ecology that emerged in the 1950s as an effort to bring ecosystems and cultures into one theoretical loop. Ecosystems were proposed as biophysical entities that interact with human society, the environment as an ecosystem that humans adapt to (Steward 1955;

Geertz 1963; Rappaport 1968). Gradually, as a response to studies that kept culture and sociality separated from nature, a more concerted anthropology of landscape emerged, which sought to avoid the idea that environment determines human livelihood systems or meaningful practices. Many anthropologists stressed the importance of *place* in the making of meaningful genealogies and topologies (Hirsh and O'Hanlon 1995; Feld and Basso 1996; Fox 2006), while others focussed on ways to overcome to the dualisms that persistently dogged analyses of the human place in nature (Descola and Pálsson 1996; Ingold 2000; Strathern 1980; MacCormack and Strathern 1980).

Thus, the anthropology of landscape has progressed as a study of the spatial dimensions of social and material encounters and meanings, where landscape was discussed as an object and as the background for life in a specific community (Malinowski 1984 [1922]). In this tradition, landscape is an object of the human gaze, stable, unchanging and outside human control. In another tradition landscape was discussed more as a process of meaningful interaction between humans and their surroundings (Keesing 1982; Bender 1993; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995). These studies often connected places, that is, landscapes to identity formation where “landscape refers to the perceived settings that frame people's senses of place and community” (Stewart and Strathern 2003: 4).

The later discussion on landscape dovetailed with a wider scholarly concern with humans and nature. Landscape has multiple roles here: as visual representation, active agency, materiality (Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017). This phenomenological approach, associated particularly with Tim Ingold, points to landscape as eternally under construction, never complete (1993: 162). The Ingoldian approach also suggests understanding “being in the world” as something that embodies memories. This so-called dwelling perspective posits landscape or environment as endlessly becoming part of the human organism and vice versa, with Ingold stringently arguing against notions of humans transcending or controlling their surroundings. More recently, Ingold has integrated the study of landscape with approaches that draw from the arts. He has put special emphasis on imagination and perception, leading to the suggestion that we should find: “a way that would reunite perception and imagination while yet acknowledging the human condition, [...], to be that of a being whose knowledge of the world, far from being shaped by operations of mind upon the deliverances of the senses, grows from the very soil of an existential involvement *in* the sensible world” (Ingold 2012: 3). He stresses that landscapes are both imagined and sensed, and researching them should also involve the flow of material and sensory awareness. Mind is not severed from matter in his view, which makes landscapes important vehicles of memories of the past and imagining the future, as is also suggested in many places in this book (Järvi, Lounela, Usihakala).

The empirical case studies in this book, however, show how markings of people's past experiences in specific places are being erased and remade with new intensity and speed. New markings are either obscuring once

meaningful features of the surroundings or leaving them open to new meanings and assemblages, including as “weedy places” (Tsing 2015). Some of the contributors even describe how transformations in the landscape make it difficult to recognise specific places. They fail to embody memories (see Lounela, Mölkänen, this volume), rather raising the question of what futures can emerge out of these profound changes, and so making new imaginaries possible. Anthropological encounters make it clear that these transformations are often the result of power dynamics, and so many of the authors suggest that the politics of landscape has to be integrated into our analysis and theoretical discussion. For instance, the chapters by Lounela and Zanotelli and Tallè explicitly argue that the phenomenological approach in the anthropology of landscape needs to be reconciled with the issue of process and power. Further, the concept of landscape needs to specify the peculiarities and hierarchy of meanings and materiality in the location under scrutiny, perhaps extending also from land as such to air (Zanotelli and Tallè, this volume) or sea (Plaan).

Similar omissions in the literature were recognised in Barbara Bender’s edited volume, titled *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (1993), which was also concerned with the political dimensions of landscape. A landmark work in critiques of elite conceptions of landscape, the book assembles (to use a twenty-first century word) an impressive cross-disciplinary range of analyses where political relations extend from status, class, religious sectarianism and gender to colonial relations familiar in anthropology. Its case studies demonstrate that politics inheres in landscapes and in discussions of them. Later, Bender and Winer (2001) further criticised the idea that places and landscapes are always familiar, suggesting that there is a need for a “stronger sense of movement within enlarged worlds” that would go beyond movement and travel in terms of Nomadology (Deleuze and Guattari 1981, cited in Bender and Winer 2001: 8). They suggest approaching it in terms of locations and dislocations; how places connect to other places either through narratives or practices, and propose to study places through narratives and experiences of people on the move, for instance, migrants and refugees.

Another angle is offered by Steven Emery and Michael Carrithers (2016), and anthropologists such as Arnar Árnason et al. (2012) and Jo Vergunst (Vergunst and Árnason 2012), for whom the phenomenological approach within landscape studies is important, but not sufficient. Emery and Carrithers (2016) suggest that narratives and representations are at the core of the politics of landscape, but point out that not only the ruling class but also those working the land, such as farmers, contribute in their struggles for power through narratives and representations, which in turn contribute to the politics of landscape.

Yet another discussion on the politics of landscape invokes an old Northern European landscape discourse. This discussion owes much to Kenneth Olwig, well known Danish geographer, who explored the early history of Danish landscape and drew attention to the significance of the polity and its laws as part of it:

The concept of Landschaft as used in Renaissance Europe referred to a particular notion of polity rather than territory of a particular size [...] The root of the word *Landschaft* is *Land*, and the two terms were sometimes used interchangeably [...] The link between the ideas of customary law, the institutions that embody law, and the people enfranchised to participate in the making and administration of law is of fundamental importance to the meaning of the root *Land* in Landschaft (2002: 16–17).

Thus the Northern European landscape concept refers to something human-made; it is a polity rather than a natural, material or aesthetic aspect of the land. The polity defines how the physical environment is shaped in any specific place, hence “[p]hysical environment was a reflection of the political landscape” (2002: 21). However, here the distinction or dualism of people and nature becomes a problem, since it leads to the clearly flawed argument that humans determine and are separated from the material characteristics of landscape. This problem of the human-nature dualism and human dominance has recently been tackled by Anna Tsing, who proposes a multispecies approach where landscapes are understood as “places for patchy assemblages, that is, for moods that include both human and nonhuman participants” (2015: 304), importantly, not forgetting capitalist processes. We return to this below.

As we show in the following, many ways have already been proposed to overcome the opposition between a political-economic analysis in territorial terms on the one hand, and a phenomenological approach where sensorial experience, materiality and language are central, on the other. Guiding our efforts here has been a premise that as a concept, landscape is most fully appreciated when it is placed within the social dynamics of contemporary political history. We suggest that this also leads to more intimate and culturally specific understandings of how landscapes are also imbrications of individual and collective choices. We further suggest that a focus on transformation and disturbed or disturbing landscape could fruitfully bring together the political and phenomenological approaches.

Transformations: Disturbed and disturbing landscapes

Most of the focus in this book is on landscape change. Economic anthropologists have argued that landscape transformation actually started when people practicing hunting and gathering shifted to agriculture; domestication of plants and animals demanded new institutions, and new technologies transformed nature on an ever bigger scale. Thus, change was both social and material (see Cliggett and Pool 2008; Crothers 2008: 135). While foragers lived in abundance, of time and often food (Sahlins 1972), and were mobile (Woodburn 1982; Lounela 2017), shifting cultivators were forced to transform the landscape. But even there the landscape is left to revert as there is normally no need for a social group to return to the same place for several years. Careful observation would show that even when such a landscape is not significantly transformed, it is still social and political.

In efforts to include politics in the analysis, history, time and temporality emerge as key issues. This was noted already by cultural historian Fred Inglis for whom “landscape is the most solid appearance in which a history can declare itself” (1977: 489), and therefore to “say anything about a landscape, you must consider the practice of its production” (1977: 490). Ingold’s anthropology also engages time, for instance in the essay ‘The temporality of the landscape’ from 1993, and again in the book *Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*, from 2013. However, he suggests that as anthropologists interested in the human condition, we should not preoccupy ourselves with the same questions as historians of art, but with the lifeworld of “wriggling, zigzag lines” (2013: 137) inside of which, as inhabitants, we necessarily find ourselves and find our ways into the future. Landscapes are not just apprehended as lived experience but materialised over time through that. This does actually suggest questions about choices and their implications, which means that Ingold’s anthropology, too, can address politics.

Elsewhere Ingold has discussed transformation by picking up on the nineteenth-century work of Friedrich Engels. He too discussed it in terms of the domestication of land and animals contrasting this with collecting, hunting and gathering, which do not transform nature (Ingold 2000: 78). In Ingold’s view, Western thinking has positioned people outside of nature and attributed the power of thought to them only: “History itself comes to be seen as a process wherein human producers, through their transforming reaction on nature, have literally constructed an environment of their own making” (Ingold 2000: 215). In his analysis, European modernity presents nature as something out there, separated, manageable and to be transformed. Objecting to this understanding, Ingold suggests that transformation is not something people do from above or outside, rather objects and materialities, as well as humans, “grow from the mutual involvement of people and materials in an environment” (*ibid.*: 347). Hence his helpful focus on human entanglements with landscapes over time. Pitching analysis at the level of human experience and practice though, easily makes bigger socio-economic transformations dissolve from view. Although politics somehow remains, discussion of how politics and human experience relate, let alone of the violent change that anthropology increasingly documents, is difficult to discern in his work.

Anna Tsing takes the “ruins of capitalism”, the Anthropocene, and multispecies scholarship as her points of departure (2015) to generate quite a different style of landscape anthropology. Drawing on assemblage as a conceptual tool, she argues that early modern capitalism was a starting point for the “long-distance destruction of landscapes and ecologies” (2015: 19), and that capitalism has made possible the new era of human influence on the earth – the Anthropocene. Capitalism brings destruction and profound changes in multispecies relations, but something new always emerges. Our analysis may show transformation to be destructive but also open up the landscape for new possibilities. For instance, an already destroyed landscape may become a place for new species interactions and gatherings. As Tsing argues, “Industrial transformations turned out to be a bubble of promise

followed by lost livelihoods and damaged landscapes. [...] If we end the story with decay, we abandon all hope – or turn our attention to other sites of promise and ruin, promise and ruin” (2015: 18). Thus, even the weedy places gather new actors and elements, giving hope for the future.

Disturbances are at the core of Tsing’s approach. These may be caused by humans or natural forces; they may be initiated by industrial activities, small scale agriculture or natural forces and forms of disturbance such as fire, floods or something similar. As Tsing notes, “[d]isturbance is a change in environmental conditions that causes a pronounced change in an ecosystem” (2015: 160). Multispecies relations or human-nature encounters within damaged landscapes offer Tsing a particular lens through which to discuss sociomaterial change. Wherever there is disturbance, it is multispecies interactions that give rise to new assemblages, or what she calls gatherings and moots. Over time these produce landscapes. This approach allows Tsing to claim that decision-making processes and powerful persons are not the most important subjects of analysis, rather, we should look at the encounters and collaborations constituting the assemblages from which future landscapes emerge (2015: 29).

The disturbance concept is borrowed from ecology, but it seems to work well in anthropology to highlight how landscapes are heterogeneous, changing and always in the process of being shaped and shaping. For Tsing the concept helps to understand how capitalism as accumulation (of wealth to the few), alienation (of people from nature or things), and objectification (of nature and people) transform nature and people, and multispecies relations within a landscape. These changes may be small or large. Thus disturbance is also about scale. If the form of disturbance is huge, it causes more devastation and change (Tsing 2015: 160–161). What is so exceptional in this analysis is how it explores what emerges in the disturbed landscapes in the course of the transformation, not forgetting humans from the multispecies analysis. However, the task is demanding, and not everybody is able or willing to do the multispecies study and collaborative research process. The approach also raises the question of whether stressing change, multispecies and assemblage, also threatens to dissolve questions of structural power. Further, as anthropologists understand places, social relations and their historical underpinnings, they also appreciate that not all landscapes are understood or experienced and analysed as transformed entities.

Bruno Latour, for instance, offers tools for landscape anthropology that keep this question open. He uses the idiom of assemblages as well as Actor Network Theory (ANT) to insert the social into the material. For him the social is “a very peculiar movement or re-association and reassembling” (2005: 7). Rather compatible with Ingold’s and Tsing’s work, Latour’s work also shifts the analytical focus to movement and action. This allows agency and social structure to appear together, and makes it possible to account for relations and connections that are simultaneously material and semiotic. It also makes non-humans into actors (or co-dwellers) rather than symbolic or passive projections of human meanings. With Latour’s background in studying technoscience, these vocabularies turn out to be particularly

Landscapes around the world are changing in ways never seen before. This collection of 13 ethnographic analyses makes the case for engaging more forcefully with the often crisis-ridden processes that result, by building on anthropology's distinctive understanding of landscapes as meaningful socio-natural environments. Weaving description and analysis together to appeal to both newcomers and experienced researchers, it shows how material and conceptual are entangled in landscapes, but goes beyond this to develop an anthropology of landscape that is explicitly politicised. Drawing from phenomenological, structuralist and multi-species approaches, it also asks how very different planet-wide forces fold back on place-based experience and become materialised in and as landscapes. Using anthropological and interdisciplinary sources, it shows how landscape formation is habitual but also laden with choices, that is, it is political.

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