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Module Name: Contemporary Approaches to Geological Inquiry

Essay Title: Outline and critically evaluate the principle arguments presented in Stephen Daniels,

“Marxism, Culture and Duplicity of Landscape”

This article by Stephen Daniels is concerned with how landscapes have evolved over time. The article draws upon the influences by which the landscape is represented, duplicated and how Marxist influences and cultural ideas has contributed to landscape representations.

Daniels is after a cultural image of how society has evolved i.e.

1. Feudal/Slavery Society
2. Capitalist Society
3. Socialist Society
4. Communist Society



In this article Daniels draws upon two people, Raymond Williams and John Berger to help him explain the idea of landscape.

Stephen Daniels opens the article with the help of Inglis (1977). He explains landscape to be a concept of high tension because it holds separately institution, product, process and ideology. All four categories are seen individually within a landscape until a landscape is thoroughly read where each begin to bare interrelationships with each other.

The article continues where Daniels comments that landscape may be seen as a *‘dialectial image’*. He explains that landscape has a realist and an illusionary viewpoint, objects and beliefs, both of which work together in order to see a landscape properly. Holloway and Hubbard (2001) explain three ways in which landscapes are represented, *‘seeing’*, *‘thinking’*, *‘describing’*.

- *Seeing*: Process of observant viewing creating a visual encounter.
- *Thinking*: Devoting careful thought to the encounter; experiences and feeling.
- *Describing*: Written description should be clear about the place.

In the article Stephen Daniels firstly draws upon Raymond Williams to explain *‘landscape’*. Williams states that a landscape is the finished product he claimed,

“A working country is hardly ever a landscape”.

What is meant by this is that for a landscape to be viewed it must be the finished product, historic events have to have taken place. We never want to observe a constructing product. The only time for observing is when the construction is complete and the landscape is fully evolved. But surely how can this be when humankind is forever changing and altering the landscape?

Stephen Daniels is aware of Williams' ability to recognise the historical dimension of landscapes. Raymond Williams draws upon Victorian novelists, Thomas Hardy and George Elliot to help him project this historical dimension. The place that is now, is a product of past historical events. The object that we see on the landscape and how the landscape is shaped is evidence from the past. The landscape shows us history. Many of these visual attractions may just be objects but they represent political expression. Is Stormont just a building? What about the events of the past that happened there. All places represent a history from which people use to identify landscapes. Daniels uses the phrase,

"So a place becomes not just a site of an event..... but the materialisation of a history which is often quite extensively retracted"

Not just one historical event has happened in any one place but many. Some loose bits of history lie on top of the landscape but the history of the landscape lies upon each other.

Daniels then uses a novel wrote by Matthew Price known as *Border Country*. This novel highlights the representation of landscape in a regional perspective. Daniels claims the novel resists patrician and bourgeois centralisation. The novel describes the landscape locally and not as a part of English landscape. Therefore landscapes will bear different significance depending upon what scale they are viewed i.e. regional or nationally.

The article goes further by trying to explain the attachments people can have with objects on the landscape. Williams describes his '*sensory pull*' towards buildings such as cathedrals. The way in which we view this building will be different from any other. This is a place where people are connected to.

However although Williams mentions this 'sensory pull' he is aware of how many buildings such as a cathedrals,

"...inscribe social dominion in their physical fabric, in their reputation as 'heritage'."

For these buildings to be built people were exploited for the construction. When we look at a landscape we think of the beauty we don't think about who worked the landscape, managed it, mothered it, and created it.

Stephen Daniels now turns to John Berger to help him analyze a landscape by a way of seeing. Daniels commends Bergers' ability to visually write landscapes. Bergers' most noticeable claim is landscapes can be deceptive. Here Burger shows his ability to critically evaluate the landscape. He describes the landscape as being in front of a curtain behind which are peoples faults, achievements and struggles. For us to analyze the landscape we must be aware of the past events of how the landscape became what it is today.

The next step by Daniels is to show how landscape has become a product. Daniels uses examples of Western oil paintings. However such paintings are not what they seem. The landscapes have been altered in many of these, not visually but on a perspective viewpoint. Stephen Daniels explains these paints to have a linear

perspective, 'centering everything on the eye of the beholder'. Mitchell (2000) uses an example of John Constables paintings *'The Cornfield'* (1826). Here the painting is revisioned by the person who wanted the scene captured. The painting can be said to be restructured to 'bourgeois versions of materialism'. The oil painting shows workers at ease on the land, lush pastures and crops and in the distance through the foliage a grand building probably the establishment of the owners of the land.

In such paintings, processes are not visualised. Daniels uses Van Gough as an example where processes are visualised,

"When he painted the turned earth of a ploughed field, the gesture of the blade turning the earth was included in his own act"

Daniels explains that Van Gough brings us close to the processes by which reality is produced, and the process that shape our land.

Another example of such art can be found in Cosgrove and Daniels (1988). The painting of "*Dixon Manor, Haymaking*", revisions the work put into the land. The country house is not pictured at the centre of its world but the artist focuses on the region of Gloucester.

The concluding paragraph of the article highlights the distinguishability between 'beauty of art' and 'beauty of nature'. Daniels explains that when landscape through art creates an 'aesthetic moment' although it may be false, it brings desired expectation and happiness to the peoples of the landscape in question.

Critique

This whole article was centred on landscapes. Although there was thorough evaluation of landscapes there is no images throughout the article. Landscapes are a visionary experience however Stephen Daniels uses texts to read them. If were consoled to texts to explain and read landscapes we would have little perception of the world around us. Only for Columbus and exploration we would no nothing about the Americas. If we were left to Aristotle and other ancient writers' landscape would look nothing like they described it. Crang (1998) questions if people were looking to get a visionary perspective for a place would the turn to texts or novels? Most beneficiary would be real life novels the reasoning Williams favoured Hardy to Elliot.

It must also be highlighted that Daniels examples are British centred so can this ideology be applied universally?

Another critique is that Daniels leaves out the contemporary aspect of landscape and focuses upon the past. There are no recent examples or sources. Furthermore why use Marxist ideas to explain the landscape and most critically why did Daniels use Elitist views to criticise the concept of landscape.

Bibliography:

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