

Grady Clay, *Real Places: An Unconventional Guide to America's Generic Landscape*

John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*

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Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994. 176 pp., illus., \$22.50, ISBN 0-300-06002-5.

I have become increasingly uneasy with the term "landscape" over recent years. It connotes a material world that is external to us and that is primarily appreciated visually. Also, it is usually a rural world and those concerned with it somehow inject a heavy dose of nostalgia and antiquarianism into their interpretations. You know the standard concerns: relics of a former age; the simplicity and purity of a lost golden age; the philistinism of modernism; the invasion of the pristine and bucolic by the city-automobile-consumerism complex. It's as if landscapes are best seen through the rear window — of a horse-driven buggy!

While both of the volumes reviewed here are situated firmly in the school of landscape studies, they distance themselves from the predictable mantra of the genre. For both Jackson and Clay, their subject is the human lived-in environments ranging from wilderness, through rural economies, to exurbia, suburbia, and the heart of the metropolitan core, and the continuum of experience from pre-industrial, through industrial, to post-industrial. In their respective views, landscapes are not shadows of things that have been, but rather symbolic statements of current social processes.

But more importantly, they don't limit themselves to the externalities of form and fabric, and design and structure. They recognize that the worlds produced by humankind can only be appreciated if we consider them in terms of human engagement with them. Indeed, they are only meaningful as living and dynamic places produced by human societies and which are always in a state of becoming. It is this human construction of places that is investigated by Clay's and Jackson's existential explorations of the modern condition.

John Brinckerhoff Jackson needs no introduction to anyone with a passing interest in landscape studies. The founder of the journal *Landscape*, the author of a significant corpus of writings, and former professor of landscape history at Harvard and Berkeley, Jackson is the doyen of the cultural history of the North American landscape. And as such, perhaps he has earned the right to be authoritative, didactic, and even somewhat ethereal in his pronouncements. Certainly, the essay-form, his preferred medium of expression, allows him to indulge in free-flowing think-pieces that are meant to be reflective, rhetorical, and provocative. Sometimes brilliant, often outrageous and occasionally egregious, he can always be counted on to be provocative.

A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time is another example of Jackson's search of popular and vernacular symbols "related to my ongoing efforts to understand and define the contemporary American man-made [sic] landscape" (p. vii). But in it he breaks new ground and hints at a new interpretation: "our contemporary landscape can no longer be seen as a composition of well-defined individual spaces" such as homes, counties, states and ecological regions; and "architecture no longer provides the important symbols" of hierarchy, permanence, sacredness, and collective identity (p. viii). Rather, he argues, a thousand-year-old landscape tradition in the Western world "is yielding to a fluid organization of space that as yet we do not entirely understand" (p. 10). And this is what he wrestles with in this collection of think-pieces.

According to Vito Acconci, "time is fast, and space is slow."¹ Perhaps that's why Jackson looks to the "Southwest" for answers to his questions about the becoming of the new American landscape. As he puts it, it's the place "where we can come close to time measured not by events or seasons but by millennia, a landscape with a history that is perhaps not history at all, merely the unending repetition of cosmic cycles." (p. 16) It is a perfect laboratory in which to examine the essential variables in the calculus of sense of place: the land; nature; work. And at the centre of all this is the concept of "home."

For Jackson, the salient feature of traditional pueblo architecture is uniformity and conformity, qualities in the vernacular architecture that were "dedicated to preserving the same intricate social order" as did rites, ceremonies, and the agricultural calendar (p. 30). Essentially clusters of box-like rooms, the repetitiveness of pueblo buildings are metaphors for their philosophy of time and social organization: "It is as if the occupants were saying that the single space, the single event is of no consequence: it is *repetition* which creates the periodic or rhythmic recurrence of spaces and events, the cosmic order" (p. 32). Jackson also sees in their preference for structures erected out of "puddling" materials rather than the Spanish adobe-brick, and their general neglect of church buildings, a rejection of western concepts of the need to build monuments to fight the passage of linear time. Even their preference for ceremonies and rituals outside of the built environment is used to support his thesis: "the traditional dances, endlessly repetitive and without climax, whether in time or in the space of the plaza — were once again freely honoured, and performed in the open"² (p. 47).

Jackson's second cluster of essays centre around the theme of "environments" consisting of wilderness, trees, parks, gardens, and home. Apart from the latter, all of these themes have received much attention in recent months, and in considerable depth. Consider Schama's magisterial *Landscape and Memory* and Williams and Whitney's treatments of wilderness, forests, and forestry in American history.³ Jackson's rhetorical pirouettes and flourishes cannot match their exhaustive, if often ponderous, analyses of philosophical, economic, and political shifts in environmental attitudes and policies.

What is refreshing in Jackson's approach, however, is his willingness to tilt at "the cultural anarchy preached by the radical environmentalists" (p. vii). Thus, his lively review of the contributors to America's romantic engagement with a pictorial, commodified, and constrained wilderness cult skewers the reactionary "back-to-nature" elites and Sierra Clubites. Jackson attributes to them a view of Nature, albeit a minority view, that is "anti-urban, antitechnological, antipeople, antihistory" (p. 88). At the other extreme, the rest of society has developed an essentially utilitarian view of Nature, it is there "for us to exploit in the meeting of daily needs: for fuel, for food, for grazing, for hunting, and for escape from social restrictions" (p. 100). Essentially in favour of the "recreation" benefits of even temporary contacts

with Nature, he hopes that environmentalists will overcome their "fixation on wilderness" (p. 90) and that society turns its attention to "the reconstruction of our desolate cities and the reinvigoration of our rural communities" (p. 91). He is not afraid to admit that "our current guilt-ridden worship of the environment is a sign of moral and cultural disarray," an ideological escape to the metaphorical equivalent of the monastic close, the designed garden, and the isolated commune.

Jackson's final cluster of essays relates to the role of towns, cars, and roads in America's sense of place and belonging. Recognizing that visitors are often bewildered by the monotonous topology of towns and countryside alike, he argues from the premise that "sense of place is reinforced by what may be called a sense of recurring events" (p. 152). Indeed, for Jackson, it is the dominant rectilinearity of the American landscape that enforces identity through its ubiquity and he goes so far as to claim that "it is this grid, not the eagle or the stars and stripes, which is our true national emblem" (p. 153). The grid formed the basis for the cadastre which commodified space into property, and established the spatial infrastructure for the rituals by which humans transformed property into homes, communities, and distinctive places. In Jackson's view, it is not monuments, architecture, or localities that ground this identification with place but memories of ritualized events in the social, economic, and cultural calendar: "a lively awareness of the familiar environment, a ritual repetition, a sense of fellowship based on shared experience" (p. 159). But as Jackson himself implies, these places are now only visited as an idea through memory or imagination and are disconnected from reality. They constitute what Acconci has called "virtual places:"

This is not history but myth, not geography but only a travelogue, not science fiction but romance: the laboratory invention of the perfect environment, which can't be spoiled by further time and other places encroaching on it.⁴

Jackson does not seem to be bothered that these romanticized remembrances of things and places past are often as dysfunctional in the modern world as the romanticized environmentalism that he appears to abhor.

Ever the iconoclast, Jackson admits to harbouring a romantic view of cars and trucks, the scapegoats of so many guardians of Nature and tradition. Admitting that he "can't imagine life without them" (p. 167) he even goes so far as

to see in the legerdemain of auto-mechanics the essentials of civilization as practitioners discipline their hands, eyes, and minds to "recreate a kind of order" (p. 169). And with the automobile came a new lifestyle, one that was "emancipated, healthy, infinitely mobile, and promising hitherto unknown pleasures and experiences" (p.173). Similarly, the workhorse of the revolution in transport — the truck — fitted the needs of a modernizing and dispersed industry. Together, the truck and car picked at the spatial underpinnings of American society and created a new social order that is "loosely structured, fluid, and expansive" (p. 185).

Indeed, it is this fluidity, mobility, and dynamism that Jackson sees as the core of an emerging new identity in the North American landscape. He argues that it is the concept of flows and movements along the arteries that "hold a landscape together and provide it with instant accessibility" (p. viii). Marshall McLuhan would have approved of the premise but he would have been disappointed in Jackson's limited application. As befits a student of landscape, Jackson focusses only on the physical manifestations of movement such as roads, streets, and highways (but not rail, canals, or air). Most of the technological innovations that transformed physical movement are here, but not a mention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, let alone the information-highway, networking, and hyper-space. For Jackson, the symbol is the road:

What seems to bring us together in the new landscape is not the sharing of space in the traditional sense but a kind of sodality based on shared uses of the street or road, and on shared routines...and if somewhere jobs are accessible, we can look forward to something like a community held together and achieving identity by the short private road which everyone uses in daily life [p. 10].

I wonder what McLuhan would have called this "community"?

What we call things is the central concern of Grady Clay's volume, *Real Places: An Unconventional Guide to America's Generic Landscape*. Clay, like Jackson, is a scholar, journalist, and communicator and his thoughtful exploration of North America's urban-rural-wilderness environments is a study of both the external attributes of landscapes and the symbolically loaded inscapes created by the people who inhabit them. Clay's methodology relies upon maps, documents, histories, interviews, and photographs, but it especially privileges

sensitive fieldwork — as well as street-work. If J. B. Jackson's preferred style is that of the reflexive essay, Clay applies the analytical precision of the ethnographic report.

In particular, he has developed his own version of cross-section analysis in the "rigorous pursuit of generalizations along a linear path" (p. x). For Clay, "understanding depends upon the continuity of moving self-consciously and completely through a place — in-one-side-and-out-the-other — and then repeating the process over time" (p. xi). In this way, he operates in what he calls the "middle distance" that exists between the microscale and megascales dominated by science with satellite photography, computerized data, and computer mapping.

The key device in Clay's analysis of the human-produced world is "geolinguistics," the identification and interpretation of "that vast pool of familiar generic names used in American discourse about the places where we live, work, and play" (p. xviii). Their effectiveness is measured in terms of their ability to match human images of place with the lived-in reality. The history of the human occupation of North America has been a story of acquisition, mensuration, commodification, exchange — and naming — of places. As Clay puts it,

The most powerful tool in this conversion has been the attachment of abstractions — man-made names, values, and prices — to natural places. All places come to be seen as sites — possible locations for new or altered people, crops, products, activities, or structures [p. xx].

But Clay is not simply concerned with the traditional approach to toponymy that concerns itself with the surface etymology of place names. The origins of places such as "Toronto," "Swastika," "Balaclava," or "Much-Binding-in-the-Marsh" have exercised the imaginations of students of place names for years.⁵ What Clay has collected for detailed scrutiny is the symbolically rich toponymy that highlights how our current values and priorities are spatialized into such locales as *drug scenes*, *speed traps*, *hurricane paths*, and *no smoking areas*. In other words, nomenclature such as this epitomizes the values of vernacular America. For Clay, there is merit, indeed wisdom, in "digging out the functions, names, rights, and obligations that go with everyday places, and blowing them into proportion" (p. 269).

To this end, Clay has created a mind-boggling assemblage of some five thousand "epitome districts," or places that are loaded with

emotional energy, social awareness, bureaucratic excess, kitsch and even triviality. *Real Places* presents a restrained selection of 124 entries arranged alphabetically from *abandoned area* to *wreck site* (there is no *zoological* district!). Each of these epitome districts is treated to a scholarly and imaginative essay that identifies its origins, function, and significance.

For example, *community bonfire* sites (p. 109) are related to Scottish "banefires," Cajun Christmas festivities, college high jinks, and celebrations of national events, all now constrained by "clear air" legislation and policing concerns. Others can be more esoteric, ethereal, and even discontinuous. Consider *the scene* in Clay's words:

Here is a shallow, one-dimensional purlieu of limited duration and shorter notoriety in which hustling, table-hopping, publicity-seeking singles, couples, and assorted gaggles of other-directed folk seek to outdo each other in the public gaze for gainful status employment [p. 64].

What follows is an ethnographically informed satire that cuts into the values of part of contemporary society and is enigmatically cross-referenced to another of Clay's sites, *gentrifying neighbourhood*. Clearly, the denizens of this site are implied to be the geriatric *scene*-crowd that have succumbed to what Clay calls a "mediated epidemic:"

Gentrification can be understood as a form of urban epidemic spread by human contact, and supported openly or covertly by mortgage lenders and officials — who sometimes collaborate in initiating the process. But, unlike lethal diseases, which required injections, sneezing, coughing, or rats and lice to spread their bacillus or virus, gentrification spread via the book, the talk and the illustration [p. 118].

There are 121 other site-essays just like these and, recognizing the need for some organizational principle, Clay arranges them according to the verities of decreasing population densities and decreasing intensity of land use. His study thus moves through an urban-rural-wilderness continuum in three sections.

Clay's analytical journey commences at "The Centre" with a discussion of "The Death and Life of Centrality." Civilization by definition has been urban centred and nowhere — somewhat ironically given its rural mythology — has the dominance of urban-based commerce, government, and culture been more pervasive than in the United States. This is why Clay starts here:

At the old Center you could find anything you wanted: meals and a show at midnight; dealers in exotic sex, pets, weapons, bonds, transport; inventors, adapters, copyists; loans nobody else would touch; music to put you in touch with the stars. Everything that was traded, everything of value, flowed sooner or later, either in bulk or by symbols, through a city's central market places and storage yards [p. 2].

Even though eroded by new technologies and practices that have decreased these centripetal social forces, the "Centre" still exerts a hold on the collective imagination. And Clay dissects its diversity through its named sites: *downtown*, *porno district*, *curbside*, *drug scene*, *hub*, *parade route*, *skyline*. In Clay's hands, they all become evocative statements of life in the modern metropolis.

The second section moves to an analysis of life in "The Front," subtitled "The Struggle for Control." For Clay, the Front is the major zone of geopolitical tension for life in the United States:

This is the place where the energies of the city and the country mix, merge, and compete; where the number of cross-grain commuters exceeds the number going into and out of the old Centre; where struggles for control and political wars between places are yet to be resolved. For the first time in our history, here is where 'anti-city' population has accumulated the voting power to dominate metropolitan life [p. 96].

This is the world of, among others, *growth areas*, *annexation areas*, *viewsheds*, and *edge of town*.

Clay's final section, "Out There: Life in the Great Beyond-The-Bypass," allows him to explore the quality of "outness" as a geographical and psychological state in modern America. If seventy-five per cent of Americans are said to be located "in" urban areas according to the 1990 U.S. Census, the rest are said to be "out." But Clay's definition of "out" could never be that of the bureaucrat:

Out There is what's left. A strange creature, for it reflects both a geographical reality and a state of mind. To many city dwellers, Out There is anything beyond "my block," or "our neighbourhood." To others, Out There begins at city limits, or at the first strips, or at some visible reality (or is it a mirage?) called open country [p. 173].

However nebulous this definition may be, it is grounded in an array of sites that Clay's field-

work has culled from the land and people who live in it: *the boondocks, the dark, suicide spot, fall color country, downwind*, and many more.

The message of Clay's provocative and engaging study is that in a world where space and place have been commodified and often alienated, the cultivation of a "thoughtful gaze" may help us to sift through the chaos of a rapidly changing world. In some ways, it argues a thesis sim-

ilar to that of J. B. Jackson: rather than a place-centred view of living in landscapes, our modern world-view is centred on flux and change and it is not surprising that the metaphors and symbols with which we identify with where we live — or pass through — are changing also. As Clay puts it, "Once we learn to look at the world this way, there is no chaos, nothing is wholly foreign, and we are never lost" (p. 269).

NOTES

1. Vito Acconci, "Public Space in a Private Time," in *Art and the Public Sphere*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 168.
2. But Jackson says nothing of the ultimate enclosed ceremonial realm in the world of the Pueblo — the subterranean *kiva*. I would have liked to see how he fits the linearity of the Hopi's own creation myth and the enclosed space of their meeting place into his thesis?
3. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1995); Michael Williams, *Americans and Their Forests: A Historical Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Gordon G. Whitney, *From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain: A History of Environmental Change in Temperate North America from 1500 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
4. Acconci, "Public Space," 167.
5. A good example of the genre is Alan Rayburn, *Naming Canada: Stories About Place Names from Canadian Geographic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

E. B. "Skip" Gillham, *The Ships of Collingwood*

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Gillham, E. B. "Skip." *The Ships of Collingwood*, St. Catharines: Riverbank Traders, 1992. iii + 192 pp., 229 photographs, (available from Riverbank Traders, 57 Main Street, St. Catharines, Ontario, L2N 4T8).

Skip Gillham is perhaps the most prolific popular historian of Canadian Great Lakes ships. *The Ships of Collingwood* is a complete listing of the 208 ships built by Collingwood Shipyards and its immediate predecessors. The author begins with the *Huronic* of 1901 and concludes with the last ship built at Collingwood, the laker, *Paterson*, in 1985. All that is now left of shipbuilding activity at Collingwood is a historic plaque. This popular history is not meant for an academic audience. Its market is the wide constituency of Great Lakes ship buffs.

The volume begins with a historical overview of shipbuilding at Collingwood, followed by the main body of the book — a complete listing of the 208 vessels built at the shipyard plus the 15 ships cancelled and the 8 conversions to which hull numbers were assigned. All types of vessels are inventoried from lakers to scows. Each listing gives a brief history of the ship in question, including the original owner, the vessel's service and, where known, its fate.

Perhaps the most significant part of each entry is the vessel's photograph. Here the author has provided photographs for almost all of the hulls completed or converted at the shipyard. Only photographs for the majority of the scows and some of the World War I trawlers are missing. For the most part the photographs are standard ship portraits. But for this reviewer the more interesting illustrations are the vessels under construction or, as in the case of the tug *Hiram Robinson* (p. 17), being assembled from prefabricated parts at Sand Point, Ontario, on the Ottawa River, for the Upper Ottawa Improvement Company in 1910.

Collingwood built ships for a surprisingly few number of owners. Canada Steamship Lines ordered twenty-three new ships, Algoma Central Marine fifteen ships and Imperial Oil thirteen tankers. However, orders from the Canadian, Ontario, British and French governments totalled seventy-one vessels or thirty-four per cent of all orders. These ships varied from World War II corvettes to standard wartime merchant ships, and coastguard vessels. Specialty craft included such curiosities as the gatelifters built for use on the Welland Canal.

A formal bibliography is not provided; rather, the author has given the reader a list of