
THE POLYPHONY OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPE STUDY

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An Introduction

In the 1950s, the term *cultural landscape* rarely appeared in print. This was true even when writers needed a term to describe the intricate webs of mental, social, and ecological spaces that help to define human groups and their activities. By the 1990s, however, the term had clearly arrived in professional and literary circles. *Cultural landscape* or, more often, the word *landscape* alone, had come to refer to urban settings, building interiors, and even computer screen images, as well as planted or rural prospects. Between 1950 and 1990, people studying culture, history, and social relations had gradually realized the importance of the built landscape. The scholars who had used the term *cultural landscape* most before 1950—geographers and landscape architects—remained in the lead in the 1990s, with architects and planners not far behind.¹ Even writers for the *New York Times*, *Preservation* magazine, and National Public Radio now employed the term *landscape* in its cultural landscape sense, without further definition. More surprising, perhaps, was the discovery of everyday built spaces as significant evidence of social groups, power relations, and

culture by historians, American studies scholars, literary critics, and a growing number of anthropologists, sociologists, and social theorists.²

Indeed, *cultural landscape* is both a useful term and a necessary concept for understanding American environments. It is a way of thinking—one with inherent contradictions and multiple approaches—that people have readily adapted to new questions and social developments. This book surveys the widening conceptions and applications of cultural landscape studies in the United States. It also evaluates the pivotal role of one writer, John Brinckerhoff Jackson, in encouraging the study of cultural landscapes. As participants in a countermovement to the homogenizing forces of architectural and urban modernization, Jackson, his compatriots, and their successors have expanded and deepened the study of common landscapes and, in the process, have revitalized a term in use since the Middle Ages.

EXPANDING THE DEFINITIONS OF LANDSCAPE

The long and varied careers of the word *landscape* in English, and of its cognates in other northern European languages, have centered on the human shaping of space and also on the dynamic interaction of actual places with mental or visual images of place. The conception of landscape has expanded from genres of painting and garden design, through the study of seemingly unchanging agricultural societies, to the entire contemporary American scene, to applications in design and preservation movements and a growing interest in conflicts of race, class, gender, and power.

Old English precursors to *landscape*—*landskipe* and *landscæf*—already contained compound meanings. In the Middle Ages, a *land* was any well-defined portion of the earth, ranging from a plowed field to a kingdom. The original senses of *-skipe*, *-scipe*, and *-scape* were closely related to *scrape* and *shape*, meaning to cut or create. The related suffix, *-ship*, denotes a quality, condition, or a collection. It yields a word such as *township*—in Old English, *túnscipe*—which primarily meant the inhabitants of a town or village, but, secondarily, the domain or territory controlled by that settlement. Thus, *landskipe* essentially meant a collection or system of human-defined spaces, particularly in a rural or small-town setting.³

The Old English sense of landscape, which was social as well as spatial, appears to have faded into disuse by 1600, when artists and their clients introduced a related Dutch word, *landschap*, back into English. A landscape, in this new Dutch sense, was a painting of a rural, agricultural, or

natural scene, often accented by a ruin, mill, distant church spire, local inhabitants, or elite spectators. In contrast to the earlier traditions of religious, mythological, and portrait paintings done on commission for the church or nobility, landscapes were painted on speculation for anonymous consumers in emerging mercantile centers such as Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London. As a result, the term *landscape* and the painting genre it described were tied to the rise of a merchant class with the power and leisure to cast their controlling and organizing gaze from the city out onto the countryside. Subsequent painting genres—seascapes, cloudscapes, townscapes—extended this sense of a *scape* as a carefully framed and composed real-life scene.⁴

By the early 1700s, well-to-do English landowners had begun to employ the aesthetics of picturesque landscape painters such as Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain, and Salvator Rosa to record the natural aspects of the lands they visited. A landscape, thereby, became a pleasing view or panorama in seemingly wild or untouched nature. Before long, wealthy landowners also had begun to remake their English country estates to match the artful asymmetries of landscape painting. Interwoven as they were with the European grand tour, picturesque aesthetics, and the Romantic movement, the conceptions of landscape in Europe and the United States by the early nineteenth century involved not only the creation of paintings of natural and rural views, but also a growing interest in naturalistic gardens, vernacular architecture, and picturesque revival buildings (fig. 1.1).⁵

In the United States the popular fascination with the vibrant architecture, communities, and landscapes of everyday America has ranged from Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and Winslow Homer through early-twentieth-century populism and on to the 1930s regionalism of New Deal writers and painters and the architectural and urban criticism of Lewis Mumford. The concern for environmental degradation caused by human activities was another American theme, spurred particularly by the Vermont writer George Perkins Marsh.⁶

Meanwhile, the growth of universities in the nineteenth century supported the notion among at least a few geographers, anthropologists, and sociologists—all influenced strongly by European colonialism—that everyday surroundings, not just high art, could provide important evidence of social life and cultural values. In Europe, several countries developed a distinct school of thought about the proper questions and methods of cultural landscape study. In Germany, geographers such as Friedrich Ratzel, Alfred Hettner, and Otto Schlüter focused particularly on scientific



Figure 1.1. The central campus and campanile of Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1990. The artful, picturesque asymmetry of this site design, by the well-known firm established by Frederick Law Olmsted in Brookline, Massachusetts, embodies late-nineteenth-century picturesque landscape design.

ically categorizing regions and settlements. These German geographers developed close associations with geologists and economic analysts and gained a reputation for emphasizing physical forms. Schlüter, in particular, promoted interest in the idea of the *landschaft*, a discrete area defined by a uniform, harmonious interrelationship of physical elements.⁷

In France, sociologists and philosophers such as Paul Vidal de la Blache, Émile Durkheim, and Frédéric Le Play founded a school of thought that emphasized the interplay between cultural ways of life (*genre de vie*) and relatively small-scale local ecological and social regions (*pays*). While the Germans tended to look for general categories, the French looked for particularities of people and place, defined most of all by day-to-day lives. By World War II, each French region had its own well-written guidebooks to local social and physical landscapes.

In Great Britain, geography tended to emphasize historical approaches. The historian and geographer Halford J. Mackinder emphasized sweeping worldviews and careful descriptions of past landscapes, whose details helped explain surviving elements of the present-day scene. The British emphasis on field observation and map interpretation, even for urban schoolchildren, generated interest in local historical geography, as did the work of the Scot-

tish city and regional planner Patrick Geddes, who applied field study to city and regional planning. After the 1950s, W.G. Hoskins's close documentation of rural landscapes and M.R.G. Conzen's attention to the details of urban streets and buildings inspired new generations of historical geographers and landscape archaeologists who are still active today.⁸

These European approaches found their way in varying proportions to different universities in the United States and became part of the basis for the present-day complexity of landscape study. For instance, by the early 1900s German ideas dominated geography at the University of Chicago, while British geography had more influence at the University of Wisconsin.⁹ Beginning in the 1920s, Carl Sauer, who had studied in Germany and at Chicago, became the longtime chair of the geography department at the University of California, Berkeley, where he revised and updated the German *landschaft* idea, using the term *landscape*. Through Sauer, the idea of cultural landscape gained prominence in American geography. In his groundbreaking 1925 essay, "The Morphology of Landscape," Sauer set forth his definition: "The cultural landscape is fashioned from the natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result."¹⁰

Landscape, in this sense, was not a painting, a vista, or a garden, but rather a particular area shaped by a cultural group and strongly influenced by the limits of soil, climate, and plant life. Sauer and the so-called Berkeley School of cultural geography shifted the sense of landscape back from a composed image to the place itself. Like Hoskins and his followers in England, Sauer and his students often equated landscapes with coherent and stable cultures and thus typically left modern, industrialized cities outside their purview. For cultural geographers of the Berkeley School, the historical diffusion of ideas from one region to another became a theme of primary importance. Fred Kniffen was one of several Sauer students who followed vernacular landscape elements—fences, building types, and settlement forms—to identify cultural hearths and migration patterns (fig. 1.2).¹¹ Thus, by the interwar years of the twentieth century, the study of landscape had several competing and overlapping paradigms in Europe and in the United States.

J. B. JACKSON AS A CATALYST FOR LANDSCAPE STUDIES

The independent writer, editor, and landscape philosopher John Brinckerhoff Jackson played a central role in the maturation of cultural landscape



Figure 1.2. Farmstead in northeastern Colorado, near Atwood, 1990. The vernacular house, barns, and other outbuildings, as well as the meadow in the foreground and the line of trees shielding the farmstead from the northern winds, are all elements of interest in traditional cultural landscape studies. The abandonment of the house marks recent rural depopulation.

studies in the United States. Although Jackson made his reputation with the study of ordinary, everyday settings, his background was one of wealth and privilege, his education a traditional one in the fine arts. Jackson was born in 1909 in Dinard, France, to American parents. His father, William Brinckerhoff Jackson, was a Washington, D.C., lawyer who had inherited a substantial fortune built in part upon real estate developments in the New Jersey suburbs of New York City. Jackson's mother, Alice Richardson Jackson, was a descendant of another long-established Hudson Valley family. Jackson's parents divorced when he was four years old. His mother subsequently supported herself as a buyer for the Bonwit Teller department store in New York, which often took her to Paris, with her son in tow. The young Jackson attended a series of private boarding schools in the United States and Europe, including two years at Le Rosey in Switzerland, known as the "school of princes," where the future shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, was a fellow student. Jackson's father provided only for his school expenses; his mother paid for the rest, and her income was more limited. Thus, one assumes Jackson's childhood included having

to learn (particularly by close observation) the dress, manners, and speech of people far wealthier than himself.¹²

With such a background, it is hardly surprising that the young Jackson was fascinated by the contrasts of different languages and cultures. By his teenage years, he was fluent in French and German, had traveled widely in Europe, and was already adept at sketching as a method of recording travel impressions. In the mid-1920s, he began spending his summer vacations in Santa Fe with his uncle, Percy Jackson, a Wall Street lawyer who also served as treasurer and legal advisor to the School of American Archeology, headquartered there. Percy Jackson was well acquainted with the circle of artists and anthropologists then remaking Santa Fe into a tourist center and art colony.¹³ In one particularly memorable summer, Jackson accompanied his uncle to Mayan archaeological digs on the Yucatan peninsula, where the Jacksons dined with the senior scholars as they discussed emerging interpretations of the Mayan past, based primarily on the physical landscape record, and where Jackson also added Spanish to his linguistic skills.

Jackson finished preparatory school at Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts and, at the urging of his headmaster, enrolled in the multidisciplinary Experimental College of the University of Wisconsin instead of following the family path to Harvard. The program at Wisconsin eschewed disciplinary boundaries and devoted an entire year to the study of one place during one century. Students were encouraged to examine their surroundings with their own eyes and to consider the importance of religion in understanding culture. A series of visits by Lewis Mumford encouraged several students to study architecture.¹⁴

Although the Wisconsin experience greatly influenced Jackson's later work, he was unhappy in Madison, and after one year he transferred to Harvard, completing his bachelor's degree in history and literature in 1932. After studying architecture for one year at MIT and commercial drawing in Vienna, Jackson traveled by motorcycle around Europe for two years. His articles on the rise of fascism for the *American Review* and *Harper's Magazine* led to a 1938 novel, *Saints in Summertime*, which he published under the name of Brinckerhoff Jackson. The *New York Times* called the book "a remarkable piece of work, crafty, witty and original," and the *Saturday Review of Literature* placed Jackson on its cover (fig. 1.3). But instead of immediately pursuing this literary success, Jackson returned to New Mexico to work as a cowboy on an isolated ranch near Wagon Mound.¹⁵

In 1940, Jackson enlisted in the United States Army. His European experience and his command of Spanish, French, and German led the army

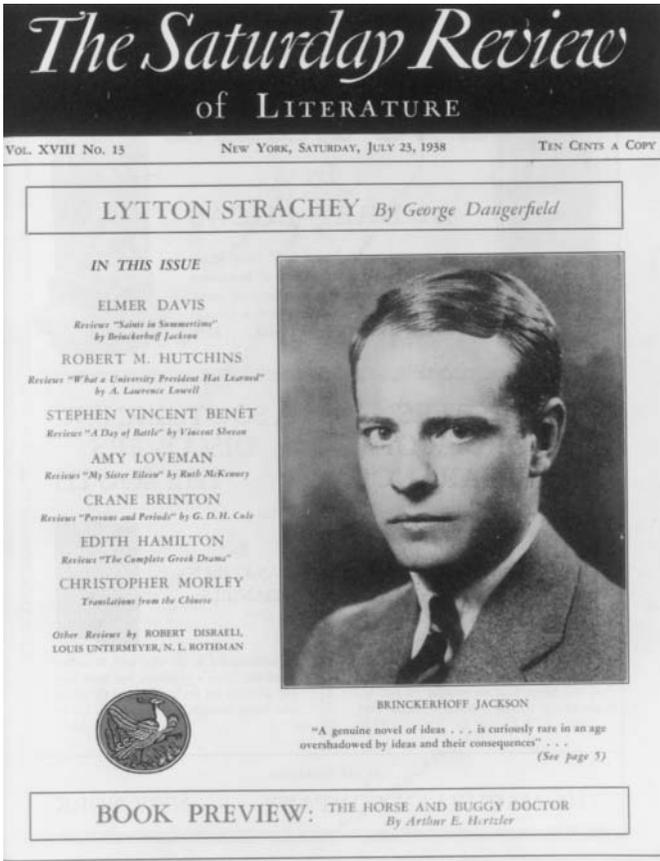


Figure 1.3. J.B. Jackson’s cover appearance as Brinckerhoff Jackson in the July 23, 1938, issue of the *Saturday Review of Literature* for his novel, *Saints in Summertime*. Friends who met Jackson before the 1970s knew him by his nickname, “Brinck.”

to make him a combat intelligence officer. In northern France during the latter stages of the war, Jackson interrogated German prisoners and pored over aerial photographs, guidebooks, and regional geography studies to form his first comprehensive conceptions of cultural landscapes—the ones where his unit would next fight. Studying the libraries of successive chateaux occupied as military headquarters essentially became Jackson’s graduate education in French sociology and geography.

Discharged from the army in early 1946, Jackson drove across the United States in a surplus jeep—sketching, taking notes, and applying the skills he had developed during the war to the American cultural landscape. He ran a ranch in east-central New Mexico until he was thrown and dragged by a horse. During eighteen months of traction, surgery, and convalescence, Jackson decided to go back to writing and to start a magazine inspired by the vivid French regional geographies he had studied during the war, and by a new French journal, *Revue de géographie humaine et d'ethnologie*.¹⁶ At Santa Fe, in the spring of 1951, a forty-one-year-old Jackson began publishing his small magazine, entitled *Landscape*. His first statement of intentions concludes:

Wherever we go, whatever the nature of our work, we adorn the face of the earth with a living design which changes and is eventually replaced by that of a future generation. How can one tire of looking at this variety, or of marveling at the forces within man and nature that brought it about?

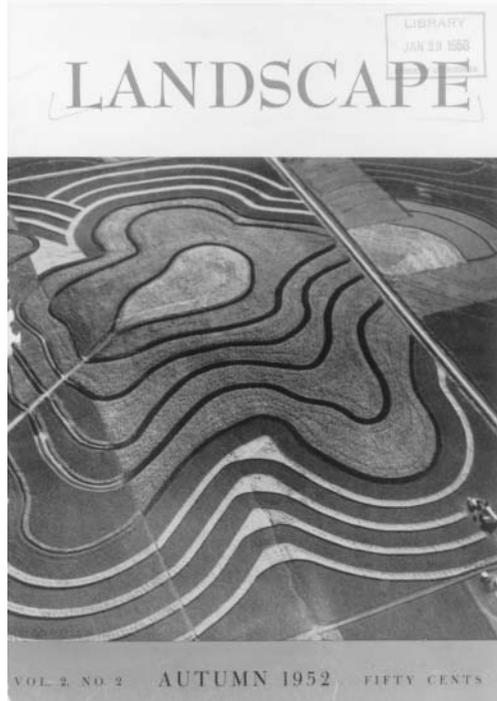
The city is an essential part of this shifting and growing design, but only a part of it. Beyond the last street light, out where the familiar asphalt ends, a whole country waits to be discovered: villages, farmsteads and highways, half-hidden valleys of irrigated gardens, and wide landscapes reaching to the horizon. A rich and beautiful book is always open before us. We have but to learn to read it.¹⁷

Excerpts from the work of French human geographers in the early issues of *Landscape* indicate Jackson's debt to them.¹⁸ Yet in Jackson's hands, the concepts of *genre de vie* and *pays* became transformed into essays about generic archetypal landscape elements, such as the house, the yard, or the suburb.

Although subscriptions covered some costs, Jackson never accepted any advertising and heavily subsidized the costs of *Landscape* himself. During his seventeen years as publisher and editor, the circulation of *Landscape* magazine never exceeded three thousand individual and library subscribers. Nevertheless, it was read by leading figures in half a dozen fields and by students who would emerge as important scholars and commentators in their own right.¹⁹ Jackson hoped to reach an interested lay audience and typically drafted conversational, wry, and piercing essays of his own in the tradition of Michel Montaigne, Henry Thoreau, and H. L. Mencken.²⁰ Jackson also contributed to *Landscape* under several pseudonyms, each voice expressing its own style and expertise.²¹

As an editor traveling often to scholarly conventions and universities around the country looking for authors and articles, Jackson consciously wove together a diverse network of geographers, historians, architects, land-

Figure 1.4. The cover of the autumn 1952 issue of *Landscape* magazine, with an aerial photograph of contour plowing. Jackson paid close attention to the quality of the illustrations and page design, in part to attract the interest of visually oriented readers.



scape architects, planners, sociologists, anthropologists, and journalists who shared his passion for understanding cultural landscapes. *Landscape* articles on vernacular architecture, ecology, American history, rural and urban planning, the anthropology of space, cultural geography, architectural and landscape design, historic preservation, and tourism were leavened by an extensive book review section, occasionally spirited exchanges about the ideas surfacing in the journal, and attractive covers and page designs (fig. 1.4).

Jackson's selections of articles and authors, and his occasional pronouncements of editorial policy, reveal his personal expansion of landscape studies. In these changes, Jackson paralleled more official gestures of inclusiveness following World War II, such as the addition of ethnographic art to art museum collections and of popular culture topics to academic research and curriculums. In time, *Landscape's* editor and contributors covered all manner of human environments: historic and contemporary; vernacular and architect designed; rural, urban, and suburban. Assessing Jackson's influence in 1979, the geographer Donald W. Meinig wrote:

Jackson points the way in his insistence on looking the modern scene squarely in the face; and his admonition is not simply for us

to be comprehensive and tolerant, but to see the ordinary landscapes of the automobile, mobile home, supermarket, and shopping center as legitimately “vernacular”—that is, native to the area, but area now defined more at the national than the local scale.²²

While he was still publishing *Landscape* magazine, Jackson began a new phase of his career, as a peripatetic university professor and popular guest speaker. After he quoted Carl Sauer approvingly in the second issue of the magazine, a cordial correspondence had ensued, and in 1957, Sauer invited Jackson to visit the Berkeley geography department. Articles soon began to flow from Berkeley to the journal, and Jackson began making extended annual visits to the campus, where he sat in on seminars, gave talks, and finally taught seminar classes of his own. The Berkeley School of cultural geography reinforced Jackson’s own impatience with academic fragmentation and specialization and his desire to understand the cultural and physical connectedness of the landscape.

Jackson eventually added the Berkeley architecture and landscape architecture departments to his annual circuit, and by 1967 he was teaching a course in landscape architecture. Two years later, he began a similar relationship at Harvard. Design faculty at both schools soon became readers and contributors to *Landscape*.

In 1969, Jackson turned over the reins of *Landscape* to a new publisher, Blair Boyd, who, with longtime editor Bonnie Loyd, produced the journal for another twenty-eight years. This freed Jackson to write book-length collections of essays and to teach nearly full time.²³ Jackson was in his late fifties when he began teaching his survey of American cultural landscape history at Harvard in the fall semester of each year, at Berkeley in the winter quarter, and at other universities for one-term rotations. His lectures soon were drawing two hundred to three hundred students, with design and architectural history faculty auditing from the back of the room. For these professors and design students, the course was a conversion experience to a new way of looking at the built environment.²⁴ Jackson’s survey lectures, like his earlier writings, took ordinary settings usually overlooked by academic study and made them interesting. Helaine Caplan Prentice observed in *Landscape Architecture*, “His curriculum is as indispensable to designers’ perceptions today as was once the European grand tour.”²⁵

In 1978, Jackson retired from regular teaching duties and returned to live full time in his house in La Cienega, a village ten miles southwest of Santa Fe. He continued a voluminous correspondence and hosted a steady stream of academic visitors. Although the income from his family inheri-

tance remained secure, he chose to take a series of manual-labor jobs. Rising early six days a week, he worked successively as a gardener, a trash hauler, and finally, a janitor for Ernie's Auto Repair, a transmission repair shop in Santa Fe owned by a family from La Cienega. Jackson found satisfaction in manual labor: "It is a blessing to be of service," he sometimes explained.²⁶

Parallel with these changes in his work life, Jackson also gave up using his nickname, "Brinck," which he felt confused his neighbors and had upper-class pretensions. People who met him after 1978 knew him as John Jackson, as his Hispanic neighbors and fellow members of the local Catholic congregation knew him, or as Brother Jackson, as he was known to the members of the African American church in Albuquerque and an Anglo-Texan Pentecostal mission in Santa Fe that he also enjoyed attending. His jobs and his church visits provided social contacts as well as observations for many of his later essays, which he continued to write each afternoon. Only months before his death in 1996, at the age of eighty-six, he completed a final essay for *Landscape in Sight*, a retrospective of his best writing, edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz.²⁷

Much about Jackson's life is contradictory: he was a son of the upper class, educated in fine arts and literary classics, who preferred studying the environments of working-class and middle-class people; a cosmopolitan world traveler who was equally at home in the small towns and factory neighborhoods of the United States; a writer, editor, and popular professor who had no official graduate degrees and who routinely set himself apart from scholars and academic life. Perhaps because of his year in the Wisconsin experimental college, Jackson never claimed any particular academic discipline, preferring "landscape studies" to any of the several disciplines that claimed him as a member. He never attempted to make his speculations seem exhaustive or conclusive on a subject. Instead, his intention was to stimulate other people to take up the challenge, to spur their own seeing, thinking, writing, and designing.

J. B. Jackson also left much work to be done by others. He wrote primarily about the landscapes of men; rarely about those of women and children. Predictable points of view and systematic thinking were not among his many gifts. He often sidestepped political questions and borrowed freely from both conservative and radical sources. Although he avidly read theoretical works (often in their original languages), he took playful, experimental, and often elusive positions on issues of theory, which infuriated doctrinaire followers of any one particular stripe. At the beginning of his formal and informal education, Jackson had found studies of the landscape

already in multiple voices and competing schools of thought. His influence was not to create any new, well-defined disciplinary rigor or a single paradigm. Instead, he consciously added still more diversity to the enterprise.

APPLYING LANDSCAPE STUDIES TO DESIGN AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

From the beginning of his writing and publishing career, Jackson applied cultural landscape perspectives to contemporary planning, architecture, and landscape architecture, often as part of a personal critique of modernist design and planning. The potential role of designers in making a more meaningful environment was a consistent theme in his writing, and he was vitally interested in the cultural and social meaning of architectural design.²⁸ Jackson sought out designers as friends, students, and as a reading audience. He and his magazine built important bridges between geography and design. However, Jackson also was exasperated when designers applied landscape study too quickly, looking only at the visible surface of the landscape and not doing the kind of personal observation, research, or reading that lead to deeper analysis. He faulted architectural modernists for neglecting the importance and meaning of popular American settings such as the suburbs, commercial roadsides, office parks, and shopping malls. He also gently chided landscape architects for ignoring the aesthetic qualities and significance of the giant rural grid and ubiquitous parking lots. For Jackson, vernacular landscapes provided indispensable inspiration and context for contemporary design.

In Jackson's writing and teaching, and in other contributions to *Landscape*, designers found inspiration and encouragement for contextualism and regionalism. At Jackson's urging in 1962, four junior Berkeley architecture professors—Donlyn Lyndon, Charles W. Moore, Sim Van der Ryn, and Patrick J. Quinn—wrote an antimodernist manifesto, "Toward Making Places," for *Landscape. Learning from Las Vegas*, the path-blazing 1972 book by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, demonstrated how the study of a new vernacular such as the automobile commercial strip could inform design practice.²⁹

Jackson's fascination with commercial architecture did not include a call for its universal preservation, however. His ambivalence about the preservation of historic built environments and the conservation of wilder nature in state and national parks mirrors an ongoing series of debates within the field. Like cultural landscape studies, preservation and environ-

mentalism trace their roots, in part, to the romanticism of the nineteenth century. During the mid-twentieth century, as architectural preservationists broadened their focus from house museums and singular buildings to the protection of urban districts, small towns, and rural landscapes, they drew support from cultural landscape scholars. Academic landscape studies have at times been closely allied with the historic preservation and environmental movements. Following J. B. Jackson's death, *Preservation* (the magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation) noted, "Jackson was the first to identify persuasively the elements that make a particular landscape American, and to explain convincingly how commerce, imagination, need, and nature collaborated over time in creating the look of the land."³⁰ Beginning in the early 1980s, Robert Melnick and Linda McClelland led efforts to systematize the study and nomination of rural historic landscapes to the National Register of Historic Places. The concept was becoming a given within the movement by the time the topic of cultural landscape was adopted as the theme for the 1997 National Trust convention. In a related vein, Elizabeth Barlow Rogers founded the Cityscape Institute in New York to promote high standards for public space design, restoration, and management.³¹

Although Jackson on occasion supported preservation, he also provided ample ammunition for battles *against* preservation and environmentalism. Here is one of the sharp distinctions between Jackson and more preservation-oriented writers such as Hoskins. Like Jackson, other cultural landscape scholars such as David Lowenthal and planners such as Kevin Lynch have voiced serious doubts about the advisability, or even the possibility, of freezing any particular landscape, whether a national park or a trailer park.³² "The power which an ancient environment possesses to command our affection and respect derives from its having accepted change of function," wrote Jackson. "Its beauty," he continued, "comes from its having been part of the world, not from having been isolated and protected, but from having known various fortunes" (fig. 1.5).³³

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND DEBATES

On the questions of method, theory, and philosophy that undergird landscape studies, J. B. Jackson's pronouncements were short, elliptical, and widely scattered.³⁴ Thus, even the people inspired by Jackson continue to exhibit diverse choices in philosophical underpinnings. Methods and theory have also tended to divide cultural landscape scholars into



Figure 1.5. Downtown commercial building in Zanesville, Ohio, 1985. Strict architectural preservationists might be most attracted to the design of the original 1870s facade, while a cultural landscape approach might find equal interest in the 1960s aluminum refacing of the center section of the building, and in the first-floor storefronts, each from a different decade.

different groups, several of them completely independent of Jackson's influence.

In one way or another, philosophical debates among cultural landscape scholars revolve around the relationship between agency and structure—the ways in which *individual* experience and action become the basis for *shared* social and cultural ideas and actions (and, in a dialectical feedback loop, how social experience influences individual thought and life). This is a basic question of all sociology and social theory. Seeing the landscape as an arena of agency and structure requires a shift from viewing landscape as the somewhat passive result of human activity to landscape as essentially an active influence on social, economic, and political processes. Winston Churchill put it simply when he wrote, “We shape our buildings, and then they shape us.”³⁵ These approaches bring to the foreground the idea that landscapes of the mind (including images of landscape and landscapes only imagined) are inextricably involved in perceptions of and actions within everyday built space.

As the early publication of a “place-making” article suggests, in the 1960s and 1970s, *Landscape* and Jackson himself showed a strong interest in phenomenology and its emphasis on “sense of place” as a way of putting individual experience back into the agency side of the agency-and-structure debate. Jackson published many writers with a phenomenological

point of view, including the geographers Yi-Fu Tuan and Anne Buttimer. The notions of place (and its absence, placelessness) remain vital among scholars and designers, and a large literature is now available.³⁶ Another theoretical foundation of the place literature in cultural landscape study comes from work on individual perception of the environment. Here, again, *Landscape* offered early examples to its readers, including articles by Robert Sommer and Jackson's Santa Fe friend, the anthropologist Edward T. Hall.³⁷

In 1975, the folklorist Henry Glassie (a student of Fred Kniffen) made an important advance in this direction in his influential study *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*. His argument is a direct application of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's notion of structuralism: the conviction that deep binary mental structures exist and are expressed and reinforced in ways of thinking about the world and human places within it. For Glassie, seemingly practical decisions—making rooms square rather than oblong, or inserting hallways between rooms to isolate their activities and better specialize their uses—were unself-consciously linked to changing social and cultural ideas. Glassie suggested that at the deepest level of all environmental change and management was the inherent opposition between chaos and control. His example has inspired an entire generation of material culture scholars and vernacular architectural historians.³⁸

In the 1980s and 1990s, Marxist and post-Marxist analysis provided a major theoretical realignment in landscape studies and ushered in a greater interest in urban subjects. In the words of the radical geographer Richard Walker, the early cultural landscape concepts of Carl Sauer and J.B. Jackson were “altogether too evasive about systematic forces of political economy in mainstream capitalist America and in answering the question of who and what, in fact, create urban and rural environments.”³⁹ To distance themselves from the rural and bourgeois overtones of traditional concepts of landscape, many recent writers employ the more neutral terms *space* or *social space*. Building on Marxist political economy, theorists such as Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey have posited their own conceptions of the social-spatial dialectic. In Harvey's formulation, “space and time are *constituted by* and *constitutive of*, social relations and practices.”⁴⁰

Simultaneously, the meaning and usefulness of the term *culture* have been called into question by Marxist and other writers. James Duncan reminds us that Carl Sauer, like his anthropological contemporaries before World War II, saw culture as independent of, but controlling, individual behavior. Culture was somehow superorganic, responding to laws of its

own not related to social action or power.⁴¹ Following from the work of Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, a large number of writers who might—with some protest—be grouped together as postmodernists avoid using the term *culture* altogether and focus on ideology, hegemony, the illusions of representation, and the social construction of knowledge. If they do use the term, they emphasize the contingency and individual acting out of culture, the importance of multiple or hybrid cultures, and opposition to cultural norms as central considerations.⁴²

While the Sauerian approach to landscape, like nineteenth-century French and German geography before it, sought evidence of cultural cohesion and continuity, more recent studies of social space have emphasized class conflicts, differing social constructions of identity, and unequal power relationships. One direction of these studies, which we might call the global strategy, has been to situate local landscapes within their worldwide consequences and connections, and to analyze specific landscapes more fully as manifestations of large-scale economic forces and multinational corporate power. In 1984, Anthony King's *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* showed that the global strategy could be insightfully tied to building types.⁴³ Another direction of these critical theorists is a focus on locally "contested landscapes"—for instance, the places where ethnicity, race, class, age, or gender are spatially defined, reinforced, and counteracted (fig. 1.6). Here the aim is not only to dissect how spaces have helped to shape (and reproduce) social hierarchies, but also to illuminate how individuals and social movements have opposed those hierarchies. With the contention between field laborers and landowners in California's Central Valley in mind, Don Mitchell usefully extends the definition of landscape: "Landscape is thus best understood as a kind of produced, lived, and represented space constructed out of the struggles, compromises, and temporarily settled relations of competing and cooperating social actors; it is both a thing (or suite of things), as Sauer would have it, and a social process, at once solidly material and ever changing."⁴⁴ Dolores Hayden's *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, published in 1995, and Setha Low's *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*, published in 2000, are other salient examples of this more local strategy of analysis (fig. 1.7).⁴⁵

Another group of theorists, who sometimes are lumped together as "structurationists," most overtly use the issue of structure and agency as their theme. Applying the ideas of Anthony Giddens, Allan Pred, or Pierre Bourdieu, they trace the relations of power that are often expressed not only in conscious political action but also in common, daily cultural



Figure 1.6. Dormitory-style beds in a men's shelter on the Bowery, New York, 1994. In a space formerly filled with semiprivate cubicle-style rooms, this shelter—now owned and managed by the City of New York—is an official expression of last-resort housing for urban underclass residents.

practices and patterns of consumption that, in turn, interact with cultural landscapes.⁴⁶

Yet another group of theoretically astute landscape analysts primarily use *images* of landscape as their points of departure. Cultural historians such as Raymond Williams and geographers such as Denis Cosgrove have taken an approach closely tied to art history and the Dutch landscape-as-image tradition. Cosgrove, for instance, has argued that the very notion of landscape as a privileged perspectival vision is inextricably linked to the rise of capitalism and the conception of land as a marketable commodity.⁴⁷

The issue of the relationship of humans to wilder nature presents another philosophical focus for cultural landscape study. Even at the end of the twentieth century, the common attitude has been to assume *good* nature and *bad* humankind. The ethnobotanist Edgar Anderson—the most frequent contributor to *Landscape* after J. B. Jackson himself—framed the issues in 1957:

The Amateur Thoreaus and the professional naturalists have in the United States raised the appreciation of nature to a mass phenomenon, almost a mass religion; yet at the same time they have refused to accept man as part of nature. . . . They are one of the chief ultimate sources of our unwritten axiom, that cities are something to



Figure 1.7. Annual Fiestas, Taos, New Mexico, 1993. A contested landscape, the Spanish colonial main plaza is given over to tourism for most of the year, but is reclaimed by the native Hispanic population during the three-day fiestas of Santiago and Santa Ana each July.

flee from, that the harmonious interaction of man and other organisms can only be achieved out in the country, that the average man is too noisy, too ugly and too vile to be accepted as a close neighbor.⁴⁸

Since the 1970s, environmental historians, led by Donald Worster, Richard White, Carolyn Merchant, and William Cronon, have expanded upon the repercussions of intellectually separating humans and nature, noting that concepts such as nature and wilderness are human constructions. Through nuanced histories of particular regions, they have detailed the intricate interactions of human and environmental forces (fig. 1.8).⁴⁹

Although philosophical underpinnings vary widely within any one field, study of cultural landscape remains strong in the disciplines that first embraced the topic. Historical and cultural geographers such as Michael Conzen, Peirce Lewis, Donald Meinig, Karl Raitz, and Wilbur Zelinsky—and, in turn, their students—have extended both the questions and the methods of landscape study.⁵⁰ In American literature and American studies, John Stilgoe and Thomas Schlereth have been influential contributors.⁵¹ The journalist and editor Grady Clay has compiled a lifetime



Figure 1.8. Grain elevators near Aberdeen, South Dakota, 1978. The historian William Cronon, in *Nature's Metropolis*, traces the economic and ecological impacts of the invention of the nineteenth-century wooden grain elevator (far left). The huge, post-1945 concrete additions reflect the expansion and centralization of the world grain market.

of astute observations of the American city in three books, and two editors—Judy Metro and George Thompson—have developed significant landscape studies lists.⁵² Environmental planners, notably Ervin Zube, and botanists have also been active contributors; in 1999 the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University launched an Institute for Cultural Landscape Studies.⁵³

Some landscape writers have faulted politically engaged or highly theoretical scholarship for producing abstract discussion with little or no grounding in the observation and analysis of actual human places. Meanwhile, theoretically based writers have castigated the work of those who are spatially specific and interested in the visual realm as being merely descriptive and as confusing surface distractions with the unseen substance of personal environmental experience and hegemonic discourse. Richard Walker, who for many years felt himself a pariah in the Berkeley geography department because of his Marxist approach, has characterized this

situation as a “schism between cultural studies and political economy.” He suggests the solution may be “the promiscuous mingling and mutual education of cultural geographers and political economists.”⁵⁴ If cultural landscape scholars need to give more attention to social power relationships, most political economists could better integrate the effects of the physical, spatial world into their analyses. In these exchanges lies an important truth for all landscape study: the lurking, ever-present potential for cunning camouflage and landscape duplicity—that what we *can't* see, what is *not* in view, may be more important than what conscious public relations strategies have made visually obvious.⁵⁵

THE POLYPHONY OF LANDSCAPE STUDIES

Given the variety of impulses that underlie its history and use, cultural landscape study is of necessity a many-voiced endeavor. In the eighteenth century, the conception of landscape first expanded from a genre of painting to the appreciation of natural vistas, then to the design of romantic gardens. In the twentieth century, European schools of geographic thought were refashioned for new American applications. Carl Sauer's Germanic interests in rural societies and ecologies and the French notions of the *pays* were extended by J. B. Jackson to serious consideration of the entire contemporary American landscape. Through Jackson's magazine and his teaching, cultural landscape studies helped invigorate the design professions with a new respect for the vernacular scene. Meanwhile, the sheer number of divergent disciplines, schools of thought, philosophical bases, and professional applications in preservation and design guarantees the continuing expansion of both parallel and divergent approaches to landscape. The recent scholarly interests in race, class, gender, power relations, and world economic exchanges have added still more essential polyphony to the study of cultural landscapes.

Decidedly, we can expect no single, unified, rigidly bounded approach to the study of something so essential and yet so complex as the reciprocal relationships between individuals, groups of people, and their everyday surroundings. Jackson himself required a number of pseudonyms in order to address the different approaches that he personally needed for his journal. The people who have found encouragement and inspiration in Jackson's influence (or who have directly reacted against its limitations) continue to take cultural landscape studies in both old and new directions. And the “Jacksonian” approaches (Jackson would

have abhorred the notion of anything named after himself, and especially any single approach) represent only one of several other valid, lively clusters of approaches to understanding and interpreting space, place, and landscape.

Thus, with Jackson's influence and also with the influence of writers not associated with him, landscape has become a common concept in the popular press. As more writers have returned the suffix *-scape* to its Old English sense of a created or shaped space, people have begun to think and write about cityscapes, townscapes, streetscapes, and the landscapes of tourism, work, automobile travel, and every other human activity. More recently, the trademark *Netscape*, a major browser for the World Wide Web, is notable because it refers not only to a framed two-dimensional image on a computer screen, not so different from landscape as a painting of scenery, but also to a virtual four-dimensional experience of images and connections changing over time, something more akin to walking or driving down a road than to viewing a painting.

"The indeterminate disciplinary boundaries of Jackson's teaching about the landscape," observed the geographer Michael Conzen soon after Jackson's death, "were its greatest problem and its greatest strength."⁵⁶ Yet polyphony is not necessarily cacophony. Many different voices, especially those that can be heard and joined across boundaries, can enrich one another. New approaches can fill in gaps left by other traditions. Whether one opts for "promiscuous mingling and mutual education" between landscape observers and social theorists, more active communication between landscape scholars and design professionals, or bridging disciplinary boundaries to move between description and abstract analysis, the very variety and expansion of approaches and perspectives continue to be the strength of cultural landscape studies—and, we believe, of this collection of essays.