Edited by Caitlin DeSilvey, Simon Naylor & Colin Sackett

Anticipatory history

Uniformbooks 2011

First published 2011
Copyright © University of Exeter / Individual contributors, 2011
Supported by the AHRC Landscape and Environment programme

ISBN 978–0–9568559–2–3

Uniformbooks
7 Hillhead Terrace, Axminster, Devon EX13 5JL
www.uniformbooks.co.uk

Printed and bound by R. Booth, Penryn, Cornwall

Stephen Daniels

Foreword

We are ever in need of words to describe the world and express our relations with it. 'Landscape' and 'Environment', the title of the AHRC programme which includes the project that produced this fine volume, are themselves such words, framing or shaping our view of the physical and social world and our place in it. They are in Raymond Williams' phrase 'keywords', historically and geographically complex concepts, words with their own situated stories, literary as well as linguistic. Here are words that emerge, expand, enclose, erode and re-emerge, not less than the physical and social worlds they describe; their semantic fields describe territories of contested meaning as well as arenas of common ground. Landscape and environment are connected to wider worlds of word making, other concepts like place, nature, site, scenery, and more specialist terms like living landscapes or environmental art.

Reflecting the wide-ranging community, and their domains of knowledge, which the project brought together, and their conversations and exchanges at particular moments, the words of this book—old, new, public and professional—range widely, mostly to describe processes at various temporal and spatial scales and unfold stories of environmental change. Some words like woods and commons are familiar and seem stable but are revealed as dynamic, disputed and geographically specific; some are technical terms like equilibrium and cycle of erosion, if defined in unexpected ways. Concepts of coastal squeeze and managed realignment have a particular purchase on the regional setting of this project, as do moor and rhododendron. New coinages like story-radar, palliative curation and the project's own major 'conceptual tool' anticipatory history, have the metaphorical capacity to creatively refigure the way we imagine the world and intervene—or not—in its workings. These words, and the various meanings which are explored in the entries on them, resonate well beyond the world of this project. They display the range of knowledge and depth of feeling about landscape matters, of researchers, practitioners, and a wider public. They encourage people to put into words concerns about landscape change that are so often difficult to precisely express.

Stephen Daniels is Professor of Cultural Geography, University of Nottingham and Director of the AHRC's Landscape and Environment programme

Contents

Introduction 9

Acclimatisation 21
Adaptation 22
Art 23
Aspic 24
Besanded 25
Birds 26
Catastrophe 27
Coastal squeeze 27
Collection 29
Commons 30
Continuities 31
Cycle of erosion 32
Discontinuity 33
Dream-map 34
Ebb and flood 35
Enclosure 35
Entropy 37
Epiphany 37
Equilibrium 38
Erosion 39
Extinction 40
Futurology 42
Introductions 42
Liminal zone 43
Living landscapes 44
Longue durée 45
Managed realignment 46
Memory 46
Monitoring 47
Moor 48
Museum 49
Natural history 51
Natural selection 53
Nature writing 53
Palliative curation 56
Place 57
Presentism 57
Record 58
Recording 59
Rewilding 61
Rhododendron 62
Sculpture trail 63
Shifting baseline syndrome 64
Story-radar 66
Temprocentrism 67
Tides 67
Uncertainty 69
Unfarming 69
Woods 70
Zone of exclusion 71

Place index 72
Contributors 75
Acknowledgements 77

Introduction by Caitlin DeSilvey & Simon Naylor

Anticipatory history

Reports of accelerating sea level rise, species extinction, shifting weather patterns, stressed landscapes, and coastal erosion—such material is the daily fare of a twenty-first century media diet. We are told that we are facing the real prospect of an increase in the rate and scale of environmental change in our lifetimes. Many of these changes—if predictions are correct—will register as subtle (or not so subtle) alterations in familiar landscapes: a lost section of coastal path, a favourite flower vanished, dwindling populations of waterbirds in a local saltmarsh, the removal of a customary fishing quay.[1] But the range of available responses to these changes is limited—usually cast in terms of loss and guilt—and we often do not have the cultural resources to respond thoughtfully, to imagine our own futures in a tangibly altered world.

From September 2010 to April 2011 we gathered people in a research network to explore the roles that history and story-telling play in helping us to apprehend and respond to changing landscapes, and to changes to the wildlife and plant populations they support. This might seem a surprising place to begin an investigation into the potential consequences of environmental change. It is more common to think in scientific or policy terms when dealing with these matters. However, our argument is that the humanities have much to contribute to these debates. In a recent interview, historian Hayden White proposed the concept of a 'progressive history'. Progressive history is guided by a concern for the future, and looks to the past to find intellectual, emotional, and spiritual resources to help us direct this concern towards sustaining specific communities—both human and ecological. White commented:

> We study the past not in order to find out what really happened there or to provide a genealogy of and thereby a legitimacy for the present, but to find out what it takes to face a future we should like to inherit rather than one that we have been forced to endure.[2]

Something of this intention guided the conversations we had during our various network workshops. We framed our network around the

concept of 'anticipatory history'—a historiographical position that shares the future orientation of White's progressive history, but is perhaps more modest and less moralistic in emphasis.[3] The term itself is adapted from the concept of 'anticipatory adaptation', which is used in discussion of climate change to describe action taken before impacts are felt, as distinguished from 'passive' or 'reactive' adaptation strategies. Practitioners of anticipatory adaptation strategies seek to identify vulnerable places or populations, and then weigh up the costs and benefits of different adaptive interventions, with a focus on 'no regret' measures that will provide benefits even if the predicted change is never realised.[4] Although supportive of this principle, it was our feeling that such work would benefit from looking back as much as gazing only forward; that in a variety of ways the past has much to contribute to our preparations for the future. This might include using archives of environmental change to appreciate or re-interpret present circumstances; or even the production of experimental accounts of historic environmental processes to help us apprehend future paths and opportunities.

Our conversations sometimes revealed fault lines, one in particular around the practice of intentional, or even instrumental, history-writing. Some at the table had a lingering discomfort with the idea of making historical narrative do certain kinds of social and cultural 'work'.[5] The term 'revisionist history' carries negative connotations, implying the deliberate distortion of historical data to serve contemporary interests, politically motivated or otherwise. It is often associated with the exercise of power— the production of 'future histories' that establish a narrative trajectory based on a selective reading of the past, and then project this into the formation of a desired prospective landscape.[6] We have focused instead on what we began to think of as *re-vision*-ist history—the opportunity to change the way we *envision* the past in place. We have been exploring the idea that this kind of work is particularly salient in relation to changing ecologies and landscapes.

Background assumptions about succession and stability (in animal and plant populations) and conservation and constancy (in landscapes, particularly those we value) often obscure the dynamism that shaped these places and their inhabitants. Species loss, erosion, accretion, and climate change are part of the past in these places, not just part of their future. History that calls attention to process rather than permanence may therefore help us to be more prepared for future change; to respond thoughtfully and proactively, rather than in a mode of retreat and or regret.[7] As historian William Cronon notes in his essay 'Why the Past Matters': "[O]ur ability to project ourselves into the future, imagining alternative lives that lead us to set new goals and work

toward new ends, is merely the forward expression of the experience of change we have learned from reflecting on the past."[8] This is not then an activity in nostalgia, which begins by assuming its job is to highlight and lament decline or loss over time. It is also not necessarily anti-managerial. Indeed, it is often pragmatic calculations that drive the need for a historiographical or philosophical shift in thinking in the first place.

This network has been actively exploring the implications of this kind of thinking by bringing together academics and practitioners to talk about how the stories we tell about ecological and landscape histories shape our perception of what we might call future 'plausabilities'. Our exchanges wove together theory and practice, representation and interpretation, experimentation and application. We asked how past, present and prospective changes are constructed and communicated, but we were also interested in discussing how we might engage with these narrative processes. In the following section we provide some examples of how anticipatory history thinking may apply in different contexts, and intersect with other areas of concern—including the communication of science, the pragmatics of land management and the practice of art. We hope that this brief elaboration will help anchor the contributions in the rest of the book, which deal with these issues but often in more specific ways.

Grounding theory

One of the areas where anticipatory history thinking may offer useful perspectives is in reflection on the communication of scientific information. Science has provided us with a fairly consistent language with which to trace changes in nature, such that observations made several hundred years ago can still be referred to today, whether in terms of rainfall, temperature, flood events, alteration of topography, or changes to plant and animal populations. Study of past records remains a cornerstone of much environmental science, will underpin many attempts to calculate future changes and will support any narratives about what is happening in nature. Exactly how these records will serve these functions is not fixed or predictable however. A useful example is that of the Perennial centaury (*Centaurium scilloides*), a plant last seen in the county of Cornwall in the 1960s and assumed to be extinct there. (Its only other known UK habitat is the coast of Pembrokeshire National Park, Wales.) In 2010 a local couple discovered the rare plants growing on coastal cliffs near Gwennap Head, and reported their discovery to the Botanical Society of the British Isles. This record of a 're-found species' shifted the narrative around the Perennial centaury from extinction to possible re-population. Perhaps

their sudden re-emergence was an effect of recent climatic change? Or maybe the plants were there all along and had simply not been spotted and identified, which raises questions about the ability of monitoring methods to effectively account for a region's nature. Was this re-found species ever really lost?

The 're-finding' of the Perennial centaury also connected it into justifications for particular management regimes. Science is often intimately enrolled (albeit reluctantly at times) in such regimes, and is far from a passive provider of objective information. This of course can be controversial and can bring science into conflict with other ways of understanding and appreciating nature. Other times the relationship is more symbiotic. For instance, Peter Bowden, Natural England's Land Management team leader in Cornwall was quoted as saying:

> The Perennial centaury appears to favour cliff-top grassland and maritime heath, exactly the sorts of habitat that we are trying to encourage through our Environmental Stewardship funding in West Penwith. We think the management here, particularly the re-introduction of grazing on the cliffs, has helped to maintain open conditions in an area that would otherwise be liable to encroachment by scrub and bracken. This has not only benefited the Perennial centaury but also a wide range of other wildlife.[9]

One other example cited in our workshops was that of the decision to eradicate two species of rat (the brown rat, *Rattus norvegicus*; and the black rat, *Rattus rattus*) on Lundy Island so as to restore breeding seabird populations, particularly the Manx shearwater and the Atlantic puffin. The Seabird Recovery Project Partnership (which included the National Trust, the Landmark Trust, the RSPB, and English Nature) implemented a cull from 2003 to 2006, which was justified on scientific grounds and did not involve a public consultation. Although it was declared a success, with a return of the shearwaters and puffins to breed,[10] there was an outcry from a number of animal welfare groups, with protests to save the Lundy rats taking place at Bideford Quay and outside the RSPB and Natural England offices in Exeter. Terms like 'slaughter' were used to describe the cull. The risk to other animals from possible ingestion of the poisons was highlighted. Protestors also noted that the rats had been on the island for over 400 years, and in doing so questioned the implication that the rats were recent interlopers—unwanted immigrants that disrupted a settled indigenous nature on the island.

In our discussions it was suggested that there needed to be more sensitivity with regard to the way arguments based solely on scientific

facts and reasons were received, and perhaps even the incorporation of a range of other factors in decision-making processes. We might go even further and follow the argument of the biogeographer Steve Trudgill, who urges scientists like himself to acknowledge the moral and even aesthetic bases upon which environmental science sits: “Science can never be value free”, Trudgill asserts, and so “ecosystem science should recognize its values and make them explicit and defensible in relation to their emotive and normative content”.[11] He goes on to note that motivation to act relies on these responses and that empowering such feelings and “exploring shared personal values enhances the democratization of the conservation debate in such a way that both ecosystem scientists and the public can take part”.[12] Here the Lundy rat example is a good one, where justification of the cull rested on a set of moral decisions: that introduced species should be removed to support indigenous species; that less charismatic animals should make way for more popular ones; and that people’s emotional responses to the killing of the rats were not relevant to the decision-making process.

Shared exploration of values, such as that advocated by Trudgill, can also take place obliquely, through forums that encourage people to share their diverse understandings of landscape history. If people can be engaged early on (before difficult management decisions have to be taken), a conversation about the different versions of the past that people privilege and promote may help identify and anticipate potential conflict before it comes to a head. Such an application of anticipatory history thinking may be particularly relevant in situations where the prospect of environmental change is forcing a shift in management priorities.

To illustrate this point we travel back to West Penwith, a densely layered landscape of ancient field systems, Bronze Age barrows, Iron Age roundhouses, Neolithic tor enclosures, and the contemporary traces of tourism and agriculture. During our second workshop we heard from National Trust staff about the conflict generated by proposals for re-introduction of grazing on areas of heath and moorland overgrown with bracken and gorse scrub. To summarise a complex story, land managers sought to encourage biodiversity by returning to an era of hands-on management and, in their words, ‘reconnecting with the historic uses of landscape’.[13] The plans involved the introduction of cattle grids, and some limited fencing on areas of the moor. They initiated the scheme after an extended public consultation, and were shocked when a vocal and vociferous ‘opposition’ group formed to campaign against the grazing scheme. The ‘Save Penwith Moors’ group argued that the developments would disturb the ‘wild’ character

of the moors: "These areas… create a spiritual connection with the numerous prehistoric sacred sites and natural granite outcrops that dot this ancient landscape… Their enclosure will be a disaster not easily undone".[14]

Looking southwest from the base of Carn Galva to Rosemergy Engine House, c.1950; rephotograph, 2011.

There were other issues bound up in this conflict, of course, but the intense disagreement over the future of this landscape makes more sense when we try to understand the different versions of the place's past that were being mobilised in the debate. Natural England and the National Trust stated their intention to reconnect with the historic uses of the landscape, but came to be seen by some as privileging certain historic uses (most notably grazing) and historic ecological conditions in order to support their conservation goals. Arguments that grazing had been carried out on the moor for centuries, and that stock boundaries constructed of traditional materials were key elements in the historic landscape, failed to convince people whose preferred history traced back to a state of untended, undomesticated 'wilderness'. Each group grounded their position in a different understanding of the place's past.

The story of this conflict perhaps highlights an opportunity to make these 'uses' of the past more transparent and participatory. Conversations about landscape history can be used to open up negotiation about landscape futures, flushing out potential points of conflict or disagreement before debates become calcified and contentious. The challenge here is to bring the right people to the table early enough for these conversations to make a difference. One tool to draw people in might be the practice of rephotography, which can make environmental change visible and help people understand that a landscape that seems timeless (and wild, in this case) is actually a very recent artefact. A comparison of two photos taken from the same

location at the base of Carn Galva (opposite) shows that densities of gorse scrub and bracken have increased substantially over the past sixty years.[15] Environmental change is often too gradual to register in people's consciousness, but photographs can make this change visible and help people explore 'past scenarios' as a way of opening up conversations about 'future prospects'.[16]

The stories above—about rats and flowers, cows and moors—highlight a key theme that emerged from our workshops. Those who make decisions about landscape futures need to be sensitive to how people know the past in place—the dense weave of individual memories, shared experiences, and personally significant landmarks that makes up our understanding of where we are, and where we have been. Anticipatory history may be capable of tapping into these meanings, in that it does not attempt to construct a singular, authoritative historical narrative. As an approach, it leaves room for expressing the 'small stories' and 'lay knowledges' that are layered in place, and then linking these to a hoped-for future.[17] At the time of writing, Cornwall Wildlife Trust is trying to do just this, again in West Penwith. Its aim is to construct a 'living landscape' of inter-connected wildlife-rich areas that stretches from one coast to the other and covers a working agricultural environment. What is notable about this project is its policy of engaging with various groups about their memories and narratives of place, as much as their land management practices.

In recording and acknowledging these intimate attachments to place, there is a clear role for the creative arts. Music, visual arts practice, and performance may be better able to reflect, and respect, emotional and embodied connections to lived landscapes than text-based narrative forms. A project carried out on the eroding Seven Sisters cliffs in East Sussex provides a potential model for such engagement. In 2005 Red Earth Environmental Art Group choreographed a three-part 'landscape performance' with participation from local communities.[18] In 'Trace' participants created an 'erosion line' across the beach, using white stones to trace the outline of where the base of the cliff face stood 50 years earlier. 'Vanishing point', a temporary sculpture made from greenwood and chalk daub and sited on the cliff-top horizon west of Birling Gap, called attention to the archaeological and geological history of the landscape. 'Journey', the final event, brought together performers and participants to mark the future erosion line on the cliff-top in a procession of white flags. Such site-specific anticipatory art practice holds landscape past and landscape future in productive and provocative tension.

About this book

Clearly there is a place for anticipatory history thinking on different registers and in different contexts. In academic spheres, anticipatory history might contribute to the crafting of new research approaches, and new narrative strategies, that are both more relevant and more rewarding; work that moves into the world, and, in a small way, helps make it. In an applied sense, it can help us to reflect on current practices and share approaches that allow us to 'look back to look forward'. National Trust staff have commented that anticipatory history can work as a 'conceptual tool' for shifting expectations and guiding different—perhaps more open—forms of engagement between people and place, past and future. Others have suggested that anticipatory histories may help make possible the transition from 'incremental' to 'transformational' adaptation—a shift from changing what one *does* to changing what one is trying to *achieve*.[19] Anticipatory history is an idea that is already being put into practice in all sorts of ways. There is an opportunity to name this work, and call attention to it. That is what this book aims to do.

The remainder of this book is made up of a series of entries that in some way have a bearing on anticipatory history. It is designed to function as a glossary or work of reference for anyone wanting to learn more. Over the course of four meetings a number of people participated in an extended discussion about the meaning and efficacy of anticipatory history as a concept and a mode of engagement with the past. As we followed debates we noted down key terms on index cards—words or phrases that have a bearing on aspects of environmental change over time and in place, and our responses to these changes. We then went through a process of culling entries and drafting collective definitions. Lastly, participants were asked to adopt particular key terms and to produce entries. This book is then a work of many hands and can in no way claim to be the product of a single vision. It was never our intention to provide a definitive statement on the means and ends of anticipatory history, even if that was possible to do. In fact our editorial policy was to be as light-touch as possible. The only real restriction placed on contributors was to be broadly sympathetic to the collective ideas put forward by the group. The reader will therefore find entries that differ markedly in length, use of imagery, style and content. Some are very personal, others pretend to be conclusive; some are no more than a few lines, others are the length of short essays; some are purely textual, others are predominantly visual. Perhaps the most important outcome of this editorial policy is the absence of a unifying perspective on the term in question. There will inevitably be some tensions across the entries, not to mention

a few contradictions and even disagreements. The format that we have chosen makes room for the peaceful coexistence of different positions, both philosophical and pragmatic. We hope that the reader will not view this as undermining of the venture as a whole; rather we encourage them to take seriously and reflect on the variety of approaches and positions that might be taken when we try to envision our collective environmental futures in place.

How to engage with this book? To borrow from a similar sort of publication, *Patterned Ground*, we can recommend several reading tactics.[20] The first is to read it from beginning to end. The advantage of this approach is that it juxtaposes otherwise disjunct entries and may well trigger interesting resonances or even dissonances. Alternatively, you can make use of the list of entries and jump on to particular words that appeal to you. We have employed a cross-referencing system, so that you can then skip to other related words and move around the book in that way. We have also compiled a place index, which you will find at the end of the book. The reader may like to read the book as a travelogue of the term anticipatory history. How about a journey along the south English coast, from Mullion in Cornwall all the way to Birling Gap in East Sussex? Or from Formby, on the Irish Sea, to the Fens, on the North Sea? There is also an index of contributors, so it is possible to trace who has written what and to consider how topics have been approached from different perspectives and in different voices.