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A landscape cannot be a homeland

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ABSTRACT

What is the problem for which landscape is the answer? In this paper, I offer a response to this question, first posed at a meeting of landscape researchers in Brussels in 2011. I argue that the problem can be defined as ontopology, or what I call here *homeland thinking*, and I propose that a landscape cannot be a homeland. The salience of landscape as a critical term instead involves modes of thinking and feeling that chafe against invocations of homeland as a site of existential inhabitation, as a locus of sentiment and attachment, and a wellspring of identity. The paper explores the connections between ideas of landscape and homeland through discussions of the European Landscape Convention, phenomenology and the term homeland itself. I conclude by arguing that a landscape must be understood as a kind of dislocation or distancing from itself. There are, after all, no original inhabitants.

KEY WORDS

Inhabitation distance
identity; phenomenology;
European Landscape
Convention

One's implementation in a landscape, one's attachment to place ... is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers. (Emmanuel Levinas, 1999, p. 232)

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1. Introduction

What is the problem for which *landscape* is the answer?

I first heard this question posed at a European Science Foundation / Uniscape exploratory meeting, in Brussels, in 2011. It was not, I should say, a question formally tabled in advance for the delegates to address; nor was it found in the title of any specific presentation. It was not even voiced by one of the many academic specialists in landscape from across Europe present on that day. It was raised instead in the course of group discussions by an observing European Commission research policy officer called Karen Fabbri. I remember all of this, several years later, because I wrote it down at the time. The question struck me quite forcefully, and it has stayed with me ever since—I am sure, too, that some others who were present will also remember it. In this paper, I want to begin to formulate a response.

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To do this, I will propose a distinction between 'landscape' and 'homeland' as terms. This might initially seem an oblique point to focus upon, because these two terms would not perhaps be perceived to be customarily linked, or even that closely associated. But I would argue that 'homeland' epistemologies and presumptions are a difficult feature of many approaches to and understandings of landscape, across the different branches of landscape research. Almost *per se*, for example, landscape is land that has been *settled*, inhabited—in no way can it be synonymous with 'nature' or 'the wild'. And near the end

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of one of the most notable statements on landscape made over the past 30 years—Tim Ingold's (1993) *The Temporality of the Landscape*—homeland suddenly appears as a defining hallmark of landscape:

[T]he landscape, to recall the words of Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 24) is not so much the object as 'the *homeland* of our thoughts'. (Ingold, p. 171, emphasis in original)

I will explore and explain the specific import and meaning of 'homeland' within Ingold's statement later in this paper. But as an opening gambit, I would argue that the varying fields of landscape research could usefully pursue an agenda in which landscape is understood in terms of a perpetual *unsettling* and questioning of the senses of belonging, identification, connection and communion we might associate with the term 'homeland'. I would wish to articulate landscape instead through a critical and affective disposition which, in Andrew Benjamin's (2011, p. 153) words, always harbours 'an ineliminable distancing'. The salience of landscape as a critical term, I have come to believe, involves modes of thinking and feeling that chafe against invocations of homeland as a site of existential inhabitation, as a locus of sentiment and attachment, as a wellspring of identity. A landscape cannot be a homeland, must not be confused with a home, a hearth, and so by extension, landscape writing must work to unsettle ideas about identifiable and unified communities, regions, nations and worlds.

The argument I am making in this paper is, to some extent at least, normative and idealistic in tenor. In other words, I am proposing here a particular perspective which landscape research could—or should—explore further. My primary concern is to work towards articulating this perspective. In what follows, I will first of all clarify the problem I see landscape research as facing. This will involve some reflections on landscape as discussed and defined within the European Landscape Convention. I will then develop a specific account of 'homeland thinking' within phenomenological approaches to landscape. A last substantive section looks to critically analyse the term homeland itself, following Amy Kaplan's (2003) work.

In the concluding section of the paper, beyond summarising my main points, I will anticipate some potential issues and objections. These include both the critical dilemmas raised by a disavowal of homeland, and the empirical actualities of landscape settlement. But I will maintain the value of thinking landscape beyond homelands, as one possible direction for landscape research.

2. The problem

What is the problem for which landscape could be the answer? It can be given a specific name: *ontopology*. This name, this term—first coined to the best of my knowledge by Jacques Derrida (1994) in *Spectres of Marx*—combines ontology and *topos*. In other words, it combines existence and location. In and through this combination, ontopology asserts an original and indefinitely sustained link between, and perhaps even a fusion of, a site and its inhabitants. It proposes that there is such a thing as 'original inhabitants'. In their strongest form, ontopological forms of thought thus advance arguments that are predicated upon some essential, given connection between peoples and landscapes. Beyond such a strong or essentialist articulation, ontopological thinking more generally proceeds from the assumption—or, alternately, sets out to demonstrate—that certain peoples and certain landscapes belong together and are made for each other, if not naturally, or in an environmentally determinist fashion, then at the least historically in a deep sense: they have evolved together, they bear each other's imprint, they are inextricably interwoven.

The most obvious and readily identifiable form of ontopological thinking occurs, of course, within ethnic nationalism of an extremist 'blood and soil' variety. In this vein, for example, the political geographer and visual theorist David Campbell (1998) carefully identifies and deconstructs the forms of ontopology mobilised in the course of the conflicts that marked the break-up of Yugoslavia. But while such nationalisms are perhaps the clearest expression of a thinking that seeks to handcuff people, culture, time and land together, it is also clear that such thinking is readily visible across a range of scales, both below and beyond the level of the 'nation'. In fact, it could even be argued that the regular concept of scale itself harbours ontopological assumptions, insofar as it presumes a hierarchy of

identifications, from a localised and hometown 'sense of place' all the way to a planetary level of concern and attachment—to the scale of the earth itself, conceived as the homeland of human life. In this wider sense, then, I would like to characterise ontological thinking more generally and colloquially here as *homeland thinking*. This is not a univocal phenomena, as noted above. The yoking-together of existence and location occurs in a variety of forms; notably it may be advanced in both progressive and reactionary registers, and it is as often implicit and unacknowledged as it is both openly espoused and critiqued.

For example, it seemed to me that a certain equation of 'landscape' and 'homeland' was present in some of the responses to Karen Fabbri's question itself in Brussels. For some present—and I am conscious I am speaking quite generally here—the value of landscape, or of a landscape approach, lay precisely in its recognition of local distinctiveness, local attachments—geographically specific weldings of peoples and environments. In this sense, landscape is not just a defensive preservation of particular cultural heritages, it is also a more progressive empowerment of communities, in the face of supra-national and impersonal economic and political forces indifferent to 'landscape' as a localised weave of life, land, memory and practice. Landscape research thus rallies around the lively heterogeneity of both long-lived and emergent localities, as set against the purportedly homogenising spread of contemporary neoliberal modernities and their associated non-places. And further in this vein, landscape is articulated as something quintessentially *affective*—that is, as a matter of human and non-human feelings, attachments and *qualities*, as opposed to the quantities tape-measured by (for instance) an ecosystem services approach.

But for all that I felt the pull of such arguments (and I'll confess to being mostly a listener, or bystander, on that day in Brussels)—I still felt sceptical and concerned. Even as I listened to assurances that this kind of vision for landscape was not based upon any exclusivity, or nostalgia, or any suspicion of mobility, transience or difference. And even as I found myself nodding, when I heard that the problem for which landscape was the answer was top-down, undemocratic authority and the tendency for European governance today to operate via the remote sensings of entitled elites and experts. I still worried at the ready invocation of terms like *neighbourhood* and *lifeworld* in this heartfelt discourse, and I came away with the thought reinforced that landscape had to be about displacing as much as dwelling (see Wylie, 2012a).

Later on, I went back to the ur-text of the European Landscape Convention:

'Landscape' means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. (Council of Europe, 2000, p. 3)

Each party undertakes to recognise landscapes in law as an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity. (ibid., p. 4)

Many readers of this journal will be much more familiar than I am with the evolution, promulgation and implementation of the Convention. As a text, it seems to me a remarkable combination of strengths and weaknesses. Its committee-language results in an inclusivity such that almost every reader can discover their preferred vision for landscape in there somewhere (landscape is both an area and a perception, both quantitative and qualitative, natural and cultural, planned and spontaneous, past, present and future). And who could wish to take serious issue with the sentiments and values of the statements quoted above? Again, I will stress here both my own comparative lack of technical expertise, and also the critical and progressive nature of the scholarship that has looked to examine and take forward the agenda of the Convention. But I must also note how, in the second excerpt above, landscape is spoken of as a 'foundation of identity'—and how in general the language of cultural heritage permeates the text. I will note as well that, in this already-legalistic document, replete with references to regulations, policies and management, the word 'law' itself appears just the once, precisely in the excerpt above, as the first undertaking of the signatories. *The law will recognise that landscape is a foundation of people's identity*. Not *the* foundation, admittedly, but a foundation all the same—and here for a singular rather than pluralised identity.

This, for me, is an instance of the ways in which what I have called 'homeland thinking' habitually and as it were surreptitiously infiltrates landscape discourse. Another example that I have found myself

particularly attentive to involves the language of 'connection' and 're-connection' with landscape, environment and the 'natural world'. This is a rhetoric that often characterises writing—academic, popular and governmental—advocating the aesthetic, ethical or therapeutic value of changed or 'deepened' human relationships with non-human worlds. And in the conclusion to their recent guest editorial for *Landscape Research*, presenting the latest work relating to the Landscape Convention across Europe, Pedrolí, Antrop, and Pinto Correia (2013) notably adopt this exact rhetoric. They talk of aiming for 'the reconnection of people with their landscape' (p. 693), and they argue that landscape researchers 'should continue providing conceptual frameworks, methods and analysis that support this reconnection' (ibid.).

Here, we see a unifying imperative for landscape research being articulated. I would never wish to deny the value of greater public participation in landscape matters, or to argue against a need for deeper knowledge and understanding of landscapes. The questions I wish to raise are ones about underlying assumptions regarding the meaning of landscape that I worry lie unexamined, sometimes, within our agendas, howsoever sincerely they may be aimed at more democratic, redistributive and participatory ways of landscaping human lives. But what claims can people lay upon a landscape—in what sense can it be called 'theirs'? And how did people become divorced or sundered from the landscape, such that some kind of reconnection is now needed? What assumptions—ethical, ecological and, I would argue, ontological—inform this kind of desire? In the next section, I want to think further about assumptions by considering the role that homeland specifically plays in phenomenological approaches to landscape.

3. The homeland of their thoughts

It could well be that Tim Ingold (1993) neither perceived nor intended any particular resonance to the term 'homeland' when he lighted upon it as a succinct way of capturing a sense of landscape in phenomenological terms—landscape as the sustenance, lifepath and medium of its inhabitants, as 'the homeland of their thoughts', every bit as much as their own bodies must be too. Much work on landscape over the past 20 years, especially in cultural geography, anthropology, archaeology and literary studies, including some of my own Wylie, (2002, 2003), has set forth from an assumption that a landscape is a homeland, in the sense that human life and practice *always already* occurs in and through engagements with landscape. Before going further, though, it must be noted that over the 20 years since *The Temporality of the Landscape's* publication, Ingold's own position has evolved considerably. In the last 10 years, for example, themes of flow, process and becoming have become dominant in his writing. Inhabitants have been revisited as wayfarers, dwelling substituted by making (see in particular Ingold, 2007, 2011). To put this more formally, a classically phenomenological emphasis upon being and embeddedness has been superseded, in Ingold's later work, by a perhaps more holistic vision which looks to encompass 'life' in general, animal, vegetable and mineral, and which draws upon art and craft practice and forms of vitalist thinking in laying ontological stress on the ongoing, the emergent, the efflorescent.

Nonetheless, the initial equation of landscape with homeland remains—I think—revealing here. A homeland (as I will discuss further below) is of course something to which one *returns*, and from its inception phenomenology has invoked myths of return. Merleau-Ponty does so on the opening page of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, in stating that 'all [phenomenology's] efforts are concentrated upon *re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world*, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status' (1962[1941] p. vi, emphasis added). Here, therefore, we have both a myth of return and of primitivism. The important point to clarify here is that this return is a *re-discovery*, a realisation anew of the fact that we are, as a condition of being alive at all, worldly creatures, earthlings, inextricably enmeshed with land, water, atmosphere.

Conceived phenomenologically, therefore, landscape almost inevitably becomes homeland in one way, because this is a philosophy premised from the outset upon the argument that we are always already embedded in the world, in a state of mutuality that cannot be disavowed. The very term *being-in-the-world* itself declares an indissoluble link, a mutual entanglement of existence and location, such

that one cannot legitimately conceive of these as separate entities. No being without world. While 'world' in this context cannot, of course, simply be equated with geographical site or position, and still less with 'natural environment', Martin Heidegger's varied analyses and descriptions, especially in his later writings, routinely evoke a self embedded in a landscape as exemplary of 'world'—indeed his philosophy can seem *landscaped* in a distinctive way, totemically gathered and staged within a particular tableaux—rural, forested, with streams, clearings, cabins and distant mountains.

For Jeff Malpas (2006, p. 315), this kind of landscaping in Heidegger's work is very much in keeping with the trajectory of his overall philosophy. This, he concludes, is 'a journey that turns always homewards'. Equally, Brendan O'Donoghue (2011) characterises Heidegger's work as 'a poetics of homecoming'. I have to note here that Heidegger's early writings do emphasise in particular the estranged, uncanny, 'unhomely' nature of human being-in-the-world—the fact that we exist in a world not of our own making, and must strive to overcome this. And Malpas and O'Donoghue, conscious of the ways in which Heidegger's life and work are bound up with the awful histories of national socialism in Germany, both want to argue that the 'homecoming' invoked here is not a return to any specific landscape of belonging, but rather to a particular style of being. But it remains difficult to argue that the language and concepts of classical phenomenology lead in any direction other than the ontological—to a coincidence of self and body, for example, and also to a communion of self and landscape.

Turning back to Tim Ingold's work, this is far removed from any kind of questionable Heideggerian *genius loci*. The tone here is now more 'relational', so to speak—stress is placed upon inextricable *interrelatedness*, rather than embeddedness, or rootedness. If humans are 'at home' in their landscapes, then this is because there is no imaginable alternative, no other world available to which one might have recourse. Ingold's writing remains in this sense committed to the argument that modern epistemologies and ways of life have marooned us within wrong-headed notions—for example, the idea that the material world is somehow 'external' to us. This cannot be so for Ingold, because humans and other creatures are perpetually engaged in making themselves a home in the world. Dwelling, and more latterly wayfaring, is a matter of ongoing craft and creation. And what we can call landscape is thus both the context and product of this dwelling and journeying—this homemaking.

Before I move on, to conclude this section, it is important to note that only a minority of landscape researchers subscribe to a phenomenological perspective. Perhaps the clear majority of landscape research takes place informed by different precepts—a preponderance could be said to adopt a more scientific, empirical and policy-related approach; a strong strain offers a critical and materialist analysis focusing on issues of justice and iniquity, and of course landscape can also be conceived and interpreted in visual and aesthetic terms, as a representational and symbolic framing of the world. A more extensive examination of homeland thinking within landscape research might look to work more fully through major approaches and epistemologies—and I would like to suggest my arguments in this paper are relevant for landscape studies well beyond any narrowly defined perspective. But equally it can be argued also that the very idea of landscape cannot be disentangled from, or purged of phenomenological baggage. As I have written elsewhere (Wylie, 2012b), our conceptions of *both* landscape and phenomenology share some distinctive points of origin in nineteenth-century romantic thought especially. And the ur-texts of landscape theory through the twentieth-century—work by Carl Sauer, J.B. Jackson, Yi-Fu Tuan—all in different ways understand landscape as an experiential locus of life and meaning. With this in mind, I want to turn now to examine the term 'homeland' itself.

4. Homeland insecurities

I take the title of this section from Amy Kaplan's (2003) essay of the same name, and I will also be guided here by her elucidation of homeland. Kaplan's essay finds its context in the events of 11 September 2001, and the subsequent establishment of 'Homeland Security' as an official military and political goal in the USA and elsewhere. In this context, 'homeland' is a term that clearly acquires new and increased symbolic resonance. I have neither the space nor the expertise to examine this current geopolitical and discursive terrain in any detail. What I will take from it, however, is a sharpened sense of both the exclusivity and

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the desire for internal homogeneity inherent, if often latent, within homeland thinking. On the one hand—as Kaplan and many other have noted (e.g., Gregory, 2011)—the discourse of homeland security produces a divisive imaginative geography in which the world is invidiously segregated into selves and others, those who belong and those who do not, ‘home’ and ‘not-home’. On the other, the gaze of security is also simultaneously turned inwards, and there thus occurs an ever-finer examination of the credentials of those who claim to belong. As a consequence, the project of homeland security is, it may be argued, inevitably an anxious, paranoid and self-defeating one. The desire to immunise against all difference on the ‘inside’ precipitates an auto-immune response in which the integrity and cohesion of the homeland becomes a matter of perpetual ambiguity and doubt—a situation exemplified, no less, by the American TV series, *Homeland*.

Because of this impossible and self-defeating desire for purity, a homeland is thus *always already* a space that is already internally displaced. It is somewhere unable, in other words, to fully recognise and name itself. This casts an interesting shadow upon a word and idea which had previously appeared in many ways innocuous and benign. Until recently in academia, homeland was a term most commonly coupled with diaspora, and was a standard point of reference within studies of migration, post-coloniality and identity (see Safran, 1991; for an inaugural examination). A homeland here, of course—with the experience of Jewish peoples as exemplary—is understood to be the original home of a diasporic and exiled population, a site from which they have dispersed, but to which they continue to refer as a marker of collective identity, as a source of continuing emotional allegiance, and as a bulwark against the estrangement of inhabiting ‘foreign’ spaces. Thus, as Kaplan (2003, pp. 84–86) writes, ‘homeland connotes an inexorable connection to a place deeply rooted in the past ... Homeland thus conveys a sense of native origins, of birthplace and birthright. It appeals to common bloodlines, ancient ancestry, and notions of racial and ethnic homogeneity’.

It is precisely these kinds of associations that concern me here, of course—it is precisely because of homeland thinking’s stress upon origins, roots and belonging, that I am arguing for an alternate thought of landscape that moves in favour of the unsettled and the differentiated, and that presumes no essential link between a land and its inhabitants. But just as ‘homeland security’ necessarily harbours tendencies to self-destruct, so it can be shown that homeland conceived in terms of diaspora and return is equally conflictual. The point of origin for a diasporic group, for instance, may be so far removed in the past so as to be more myth or dream than actuality. Equally, in many instances the homeland may no longer ‘wholly’ or ‘properly’ exist, it may be divided, colonised or submerged. A homeland may also have never existed, or may exist only within a repeatedly deferred future, as the aspiration that marks the wanderings of the diaspora.

But most notably of all, we can argue that a homeland only comes to exist *once* there is exile and displacement. As I noted earlier, a homeland is always a place of desired return, thus it is *never where one at present dwells*, it is always instead somewhere distant. Homeland shimmers into existence as something already lost, remote and absent. Exile and displacement are, in a strong sense, the very *preconditions* of any thought of homeland. Uprootedness is originary, we might say—and yearning for a return to one’s roots is an inherently paradoxical or aporetic feeling—there being, in principle, no roots, no original place. This is Kaplan’s verdict:

the homeland is created not out of unbroken connections to a deeply rooted past, but from the trauma of severance and the threat of abandonment. A homeland is something a larger power threatens to occupy or take away, and one has to fight to regain. The word *homeland* has a kind of anxious redundancy, home and land, as though trying to pin down an uneasy connection between the two that threatens to fly apart. (ibid., p. 90, original emphasis)

She goes on to draw out further the implications of the fact that any sense of homeland is predicated on its absence. Even if one were to physically return, the homeland would not be found again, the past is irretrievable. The suspicion would surely dawn that there had never been a homeland to start with. In this sense, far from constituting some existential anchorage or bedrock, homeland connotes a kind of untethered doubtfulness. In extremis Kaplan argues that it becomes precisely the opposite: ‘the homeland ... proves a fundamentally uncanny place, haunted by prior and future losses, invasions, abandonment. The uncanny, after all, in Freud is a translation of *unheimlich*, the ‘unhomely’.

homeland is haunted by all the unfamiliar yet strangely familiar foreign spectres that threaten to turn it into its opposite' (ibid.).

5. Unsettled landscapes

At this point, before concluding and prospecting forwards, I will summarise my arguments thus far:

- 'What is the problem for which landscape is the answer?' This is a fascinating question, because its format obliges us to define landscape in terms of a response, an agenda, a research programme.
- What is the problem? Ontopology, or 'homeland thinking'—the assumption of a binding connection between land and life, a shared nativity.
- Unsettling homeland thinking is thus a critical agenda for landscape research—but the further issue is that landscape itself is historically and conceptually freighted with such thinking. It is difficult to disentangle phenomenological approaches in particular from this inheritance.
- Yet, even a brief analysis of the term homeland reveals it to be not only complex and multi-faceted, but also constitutively divided within itself, never fully present to itself.

A landscape cannot be a homeland—cannot aspire to be such—because there are no such homelands for us to inhabit. There are no original inhabitants.

I was in the midst of preparing this paper when I noticed a new article appear on the website of *cultural geographies*—a paper by Hayden Lorimer (2014), called 'Homeland'.¹ This is the latest in an impressive sequence of landscape stories by Lorimer, set in the highlands of Scotland. Or perhaps 'bio-geographies' would be a more accurate description, given Lorimer's interest in the intricacies of land and life forms. Here, in the context of a family history, homeland is defined with some subtlety. It emerges through, and abides within, 'the emotional geographies of topography ... coaxed from feelings of attachment and estrangement, intimacy and remoteness, togetherness and individuality' (p. 584).

On reading this, and not for the first time, I experienced doubts. Was my argument about landscape and homeland already too severe? Shouldn't I compromise? Couldn't a story of homeland and belonging not also be a story about transience and distancing? Is the key issue then more to do with the textures of our writing, rather than the purity of our concepts?

Turning back first to the postcolonial literatures in which homeland has been most extensively discussed, what of the many instances in which discourses of landscape and belonging are notable elements in the reassertion of indigenous identities and rights? While the very word 'indigenous' may be ontopological in its definition, does claiming that there are no original inhabitants not risk complicity with colonial desires to picture the landscape as empty, uninhabited, un-storied? In this context, care and criticality are needed. I hope that claiming a landscape cannot be a homeland may in fact be a means of further subjecting colonial suppositions to critique. Claims to possession and recognition may be as firmly in the ambit of a colonial proprietorial imaginary, as they are emergent from within any indigenous ontology, for example (see Cameron, de Leeuw, & Desbiens, 2014). Equally, the picturing of particular groups and peoples as distinctively land-locked may perpetuate, inadvertently or not, a hierarchy in which those peoples may be positioned as historically marginal.

More widely, another rejoinder to my arguments here could be that they seem to fly in the face of historical evidence and empirical actuality. I noted at the outset that this paper has a normative dimension, but of course it is also evident that many landscapes are the indisputable product of long-duree inhabitation. They have evolved over centuries as both daily experience and symbolic freight. As noted above, the notion of *settlement* is in many ways integral to landscape. The task of much landscape research—landscape history and archaeology in particular—is precisely to bear witness to this ongoing settling, in its phases of both continuity and conflict. The rejoinder will thus be that it *must* be possible to speak about the close, deeply felt and time-rich connections between peoples and landscapes—pragmatically, beneficially and progressively—without necessarily succumbing to

essentialism, or subscribing to a belief in some form of autochthony, let alone to any kind of extremist 'blood and soil' ethnocentrism?

Of course it is. Of course it is important to understand and testify to the values and investments people have in landscape. Of course we need subtle narratives of 'home and its hinterland' such as Lorimer's. Of course it is vital to be alert to the iniquities of disinheritance and dispossession. But I do think it is of course also possible to think landscapes historically without necessarily subscribing to homeland thinking—it is not a question of a false choice between an idealistic vision and a factual ground. And I think we also need other arguments and principles as well. I chose a quotation by Emmanuel Levinas to headline this paper—a harsh quote: 'one's implementation in a landscape, one's attachment to place ... is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers', (Levinas, 1990, p. 232). This quotation is taken from a short essay by Levinas inspired by the first spaceflight of the cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. In this essay, as so often, Levinas is looking to speak against elements of Heidegger's philosophy, and here he is vitriolic in his criticism of a thinking he describes as 'snuggled up inside the 'Place' (ibid., p. 231). Gagarin, by contrast, is praised for having escaped from the cloying confines of this kind of landscape, out into an abstract space.

I think that Levinas's words do send a signal that landscape research would benefit from heeding? If I may draw closer to concluding through a personal example, I myself grew up in a disputed country (Northern Ireland) where, if they could only have admitted it, no one felt that they truly belonged. Those who aspired to a unified Ireland felt out of place in the northern dispensation, but distanced also to a degree from the world of the south. Those who identified with Britain felt estranged from an Ireland they nonetheless at least partly inhabited. Today there is a formal peace, but things remain unsettled. Any landscape must be a reckoning with such provisionality; a kind of dislocation or distancing from itself.

One positive direction in which this thinking could develop would be towards landscapes of welcome, hospitality and sanctuary—more vital to maintain than any cultural heritage. But I could also, in signing-off, emphasise ideas of dislocation and distance in other ways. In his essay *Uncanny Landscape*, Jean-Luc Nancy (2005) offers what is in some ways an antidote to the vision of gathering and homecoming presented in Heidegger's *Building Dwelling Thinking*. Instead of landscape as a gathering in which dwelling can blossom, instead of any possible communion of being and location, landscape here serves to index an incessant spacing, dispersal and distancing. 'The landscape'—I conclude with another definition—'is the space of strangeness or estrangement..the land of those who have no land, who have lost their way' (pp. 60–61). How might this be one pathway for landscape research?

Note

1. I need to note here that I am currently one of the editors of *cultural geographies*.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

[AQ6](#)

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