Chapter 4

NAMING AND CLAIMING DISCOURSE
The “Practice” of Landscape and Place in Human Geography

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1. SETTING THE SCENE

This is a paper about concepts, classification and the ordering of knowledge. Conceptualising the world consists of labelling knowledge by another name – we employ suitable concepts using our worldly experiences and knowledges. Withers (1996: 275) claims that “classification is intrinsic to knowledge”, hence, “we label knowledge as an inevitable consequence of ordering the world”. The relationship between concepts and categories and the world is thus dialectical – concepts and categories “are contexts and subjects of geographical experiences” (Relph 1985: 21). Therefore, there is a need to always “be sensitive to the reciprocal relationships between geographical ‘texts’ and the epistemological contexts of their production and use” (Withers 1996: 275). Consequently, the dialectics of language (i.e. its concepts and classifications) and their relationship to the world provide meaning and direction to the world. Even more importantly, dialectics of language annex the world.

In order to develop and further illustrate such a claim, this paper will focus on how the world becomes conceptualised, classified and ordered into landscape and place respectively, and how this can ultimately be seen as a process of annexation. Landscape and place are well-established concepts within human geography, and have been debated for decades (e.g., Tuan 1974; Relph 1976; Entrikin 1991; Cresswell 1996, 2003; Smith 1996a; Cosgrove 2000; Olwig 2002). Related disciplines such as philosophy (e.g., Casey 1993; 2001), anthropology (e.g., Basso 1996), and art history (e.g.,
Lippard 1997) are also increasingly taking an interest in a world conceptualised as landscape and place. Why, then, might it be necessary to examine these concepts’ histories and workings again? Given that concepts are essential analytical tools employed within the social sciences and the humanities, there is every reason to support ongoing contemplation in regards to how they work (e.g., Tuan 1991). More specifically, scientific debates concerning landscape and place often prove to be complicated, confusing and elusive (e.g., Casey 2001; Cloke & Jones 2001). Both concepts are used interchangeably and as separate categories. The overwhelming research activity done contributes to the maintenance of the multifarious natures of these concepts – “each can be used in several senses and at many levels of theoretical sophistication” (Smith 1996a: 189).

As well, the concepts of landscape and place are not only of relevance within the confines of academia. They are to a great extent employed within the areas of physical planning and environmental management (e.g., Geelmuyden 1993; Jones & Daugstad 1997; Widgren 1997). One of the most crucial dimensions in regards to the conceptual practice of landscape and place, both within scientific and applied discourses, is their role in debates over what interests are to be represented in the shaping of our surroundings. The already-noted dialectical relationship between conceptual practice and the world is thus pertinent, in regards to the power of the concepts themselves and their abilities in creating reality. This means that not only does language provide meaning and direction to the concepts of landscape and place, it (more importantly) also orders landscapes and places in a concrete fashion – for example, classifying landscapes into everyday landscapes or landscapes of high scenic value can be seen as strategies aimed at creating both a conceptual order and an ordering of physical landscapes in a concrete manner. There is a relative lack of reflection over how notions of ownership and the annexation of the world in a concrete manner are involved in such an “ordering process”. On the one hand, ownership in this context refers to how our differing conceptual practices are strategies for writing oneself into and annexing a discourse, or parts of a discourse, or at best creating new discourses. On the other hand, it refers to how such an exercise contributes to an annexing of what discourse ultimately refers to, i.e. on a concrete level. I argue that ownership in regards to concepts, discourses and realities is a crucial ingredient in any scientific endeavour. What therefore concerns me is how the practice or employment of landscape and place within a geographical discourse structures our concepts, discourses and realities? Consequently, I conceptualise ownership as being outside of the traditional territories of legal and financial systems. Ownership is rather “considered in terms of space engaged in action and