

Landscapes of blindness and visual impairment: sight, touch and laughter in the English countryside

Thesis by

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To my niece, Bethan, born on the bathroom floor

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Abstract

Through ethnographic research acting as a sighted guide for members of specialist walking groups who visit areas of the Lake District and Peak District, in this thesis I illustrate how people with blindness experience and talk about their landscape encounters. Building on work on landscape and the body, in the wake of ‘non-representational theory’, a distinct approach to interpreting landscape experience is advocated, where these experiences are understood to exist in reciprocal ‘becomings’ which draw variably from the possible material, embodied and discursive domains of landscape. Attention is also given to limits of personal testimony about embodied experiences of landscape and the contribution that neurobiological research might make to better understanding embodied experience. These dynamics of interview testimony and processes of landscape experience are illustrated in the thesis through recourse to interview material, ethnographic field-notes, photographic, video data and secondary research material. Specific attention is given to the inter-corporeal and inter-subjective processes of vision, touch and laughter which are found to be key elements in blind walkers’ encounters with and talk of, the material landscapes of the Lakes and Peaks. These representations of blind walkers’ landscape experiences are important because they help to offset the rather ‘ablist’ literature which has tended to be evident in representations of countryside users and representations of landscape as a form of distant and objectifying visual apprehension.

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‘The sun does not shine for my physical eyes, nor does the lightning flash, nor do the trees turn green in spring; but they have not therefore ceased to exist, any more than the landscape is annihilated when you turn your back on it.’

(Deaf-blind writer Helen Keller 1908, 67)

Introduction

Landscapes of sight and blindness

Body-landscape encounters

There has long been a connection in Western thought between sight and knowledge; the physical eye with the subject 'I' and perhaps nowhere is this approach to knowledge more evident than in the discipline of geography and in the uptake and use of the concept of landscape. Geography is a discipline where 'Seeing and knowing are often conflated' (Rose 1993, 87). This has led Yi-Fu Tuan to go so far as to say that '...blindness makes a geographical career virtually impossible' (Tuan 1979, 413), while writing from a similar era Douglas Pocock considered that '....geography is to such an extent a visual discipline that, uniquely among the social sciences, sight is almost certainly a prerequisite for its pursuit' (Pocock 1980, 385). Such an 'ocular-centric' (Jay, 1994) approach to knowledge is particularly evident in conceptualizations of landscape; where for example geographer Jackson (1984) defined landscape as '...a portion of the earth's surface that can be comprehended at a glance' (3) while for Cosgrove (1984) landscape is '...a way of seeing the world' (13). In order to de-centre this apparent hegemony of the eye in the conceptualization of landscape¹ and counteract the tendency toward 'ablist' research (Parr and Butler 1999) which excludes the knowledge and experiences of disabled people, in this thesis I set out to ask: How do walkers with blindness² experience rural landscapes³?

This research develops a theoretical agenda most closely associated with recent developments in cultural geography. However I also hope that in exploring walker's with blindness' experiences of landscape much of the content of this research will be

¹ A point that Cosgrove himself has recently acknowledged in his essay 'Landscape and the European sense of sight' (Cosgrove 2003)

² I use the term 'walkers with blindness' and 'people with blindness' in this thesis to indicate people with a spectrum of visual conditions. Ordering the term 'people/ walkers with blindness' rather than 'blind people' is a deliberate strategy of prioritizing their humanity prior to their disability. However debate on 'correct' terminology for blindness, partial sight and visual impairment continues to circulate, Bolt (2005) in a review of terms for blindness argues that it would be better to simply use the word visual impairment for the term blind is associated with lack and has 'too many negative connotations'. However, I prefer to agree with Kleege (1998) who argues that we should adopt and colonise the term blind in order combat any such negative connotations.

³ Here landscape is understood as both a discursive and material phenomenon; a conceptualization I will build on in Chapter 2.

relevant to an array of disciplines which deal with concepts of landscape. For researching people with blindness who visit the countryside is a topic which has also been inspired by a move I took from a Department of Geography (where I was an undergraduate) to a Department of Landscape. This move drew my attention to the way in which landscape planners often continue to associate landscape with realist visual values⁴; values that struck me as ‘illusory’ for they are based on an assumption of a singular, ‘able’ body. It therefore seemed particularly important that walker’s with blindness’ experiences of rural landscape be heard by audiences in both geography and landscape planning disciplines in order to allow an appreciation of some of the diverse ways in which differently embodied individuals experience the same space and help to develop a way of approaching the landscape concept which can encompass a diversity of embodied perspectives.

The theoretical approach to the research was initially influenced by anthropologist Tim Ingold’s (2000) account of landscape as a form of embodied practice and geographer Wylie’s (2002) work which built on Ingold’s account and developed an interpretation of hill walking as an ‘enactment of self and landscape’. Taking inspiration from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, Ingold critiques approaches to landscape which treat landscape as simply a background or system of representation, and instead argues that ‘...the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them’ (193). With reference to Breughel’s painting ‘The Harvesters’ (Figure 1) Ingold suggests that ‘... through the exercises of descending and climbing, and their different muscular entailments, the contours of the landscape are not so much measured as felt – they are directly incorporated into our bodily experience’ (203). Thus for Ingold ‘...meanings are not attached to landscape but are gathered from it’ (205). This seemed a particularly relevant conceptualization of landscape to

⁴ For example considerable ‘landscape research’ continues to apply fixed visual landscape concepts to the socio-material world through methods such as landscape character assessment (Scott 2002) and treating landscape as ‘a holistic planning tool’ (Tress and Tress, 2001).

the experiences of walkers with blindness⁵ and in fact Ingold even draws upon the testimony of people with blindness in order to support his arguments⁶.



Figure i The Harvesters, Pieter Breugal 1565

Since this initial engagement with Ingold’s work, the research approach has evolved through encounters with relevant literature, supervisors and research participants. In particular my research has developed through a dialogue with keen advocates of ‘non representational theory’(Thrift 1996;1997; 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2003) – these are a set of theories which think through the limits of representation and place an emphasis on embodied practice, emotion and intuition as well as representation. I have developed a particular ‘non-representational’ focus on what can and cannot be put into words when speaking across embodied differences, what neuroscience can add to our accounts of the body and how an embodied practice such as walking can open up particular aspects of the world. I have developed these research interests alongside my encounters with people who have blindness, following an agenda for post-modern disability research, which is not simply limited to developing individual

⁵ Ingold’s account of landscape has also received considerable critical attention in geography (Clope and Jones 2001; Lorimer and Lund 2003; Wylie 2003; Wylie 2005) and Thrift (1999) uses his work to support his arguments for a non-representational approach to research (see Chapter 2).

⁶ The use of blind testimony is a topic I give critical attention to in chapter 4.

rights and interests, but which focuses on ‘...the ways in which disability can inform or challenge theory itself’ (Corker and Shakespeare 2002, 15).

The empirical element of the research has entailed in-depth ethnographic and interview work, volunteering as a sighted guide for blind and visually impaired walking groups who visit the Lakes and Peaks. Choosing to research blind and visually impaired walking groups that visit these landscapes, which are renowned for their scenic beauty, has been a deliberate strategy aimed at unsettling simplistic associations of landscape with an individual’s visual apprehension, highlighting a diversity of countryside users and exploring collective enactments of landscape, walking, sight and blindness.

This research coincides with the Countryside Agency Diversity Review (2005a) and the Disability Discrimination Act (2005). These are government guidelines which oblige organizations involved in the delivery of countryside leisure opportunities to make their services accessible. In the wake of these guidelines organizations such as National Parks and the Ramblers Association have had to commission research and develop access strategies that reach beyond the stereotypical white, middle aged, middle class, able bodied countryside user and attract visitors from a greater diversity of socio-economic, disabled and ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately there is a danger that in following such strategies a visit to, and knowledge of, *the* British countryside landscape get associated with being a necessary element of citizenship (Tolia-Kelly 2006). Furthermore, these access strategies and research which has informed these strategies has also tended to be indicative of a rather one-way, disempowering attitude toward knowledge of countryside landscape for they have tended to be limited to issues of service delivery and access (see Countryside Agency 2005b) rather than what can be learnt from a diversity of countryside users.

This one-way attitude toward knowledge of *the* countryside landscape is typified by the Ramblers Association when they quote their constitutional aim in their forward to guidelines for walking with people with disabilities: ‘To help all persons...to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside’ (2003). And while such ‘help’ may seem innocuous enough, it may also be in danger of bringing about a situation where it is ‘us’ (the typical user) teaching ‘them’ (the ‘different’ user) about *the*

countryside landscape. My research approach is therefore rather different from this and is not primarily directed at informing these access policies or developing interpretative services for visitors with blindness. Rather I am interested in what a diversity of people might learn from the experiences of blind and visually impaired visitors to areas of scenic landscape.

Thesis structure and argument

I will briefly outline the structure of the thesis before turning to discuss each chapter in more detail. In this thesis, Chapters 1– 4 constitute a literature review which helps to contextualize the empirical research. The chapters draw on interdisciplinary literature on landscape (Chapter 1, 2), embodiment (Chapter 2, 3, 4), walking (Chapter 3) and blindness (Chapter 4) and help to develop a critical approach to researching ‘body-landscape’⁷ encounters; I advocate an approach to landscape as variably positioned along a nature-culture continuum, showing landscape to involve variable combinations of ideological, discursive and neuro-biological forces. I argue that the relevance of each of these interlocking forces cannot be pre-determined, rather they are dependent on the specific landscape research context. Chapter 5 builds on these insights into the nature of body-landscape encounter and outlines the methodological approach and methods adopted during the research process. I argue that in order to elucidate features of walkers with blindness’ body-landscape experience individual blind testimony must be combined with researcher observations and insights from neuro-biology. Chapter 6 introduces the empirical research outlining a typical day’s walk for the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking group using photographic, video and fieldnote material. This chapter forms a base for subsequent thematically ordered work on vision (Chapter 7), touch (Chapter 8) and laughter (Chapter 9). Each of these final three empirical chapters builds on subsequent literature and the outline of a typical walk found in Chapter 6. In these chapters I foster an approach to knowledge which attempts to honour, yet also acknowledge, the limits of interview testimony; stretch the remit and, yet, also attend to the limits of research representations and still elucidate rather than annihilate blind walker’s experiences of landscape. These final chapters may be read separately, for

⁷ I use the hyphenated term body-landscape to emphasise the way in which these two phenomena are inevitably co-constituted.

each chapter explores a different aspect of blind walkers' body-landscape experiences. These chapters do not constitute a comprehensive reckoning of walkers with blindness body-landscape experiences. The sensuous reality of the landscape is not a 'general' condition for them; for walkers with blindness experience a spectrum of visual conditions and a spectrum of embodied experiences. Therefore the chapters must be read as indicative of a range of ways in which the blind walker encounters the landscape and the range of ways in which blind walkers are able to talk of those experiences themselves.

Chapter 1 explores the association of landscape with visual apprehension – an association that would seem to render (at least superficially) those with blindness an unnecessary presence in landscape as a domain of academic enquiry and in the material topography of the Lakes and Peaks. The chapter illustrates the ways in which landscape has been variously associated with visual apprehension in both popular/geographical imaginaries. These ideas of landscape as visual apprehension may be attributed to an ocular-centric (Jay 1994) (distant and objectifying) mode of Western thought; to geography as a science of observation and as imperial discipline; to developments in art and travel; to romantic thought and to urban-industrial development which resulted in the representation and consumption of rural landscapes such as the Lakes and Peaks as areas of picturesque scenery.

'New cultural geography' of the past two decades has taken a critical approach to these associations of landscape with visual apprehension; de-naturalizing the landscape concept and revealing how landscape is a culturally constructed 'way of seeing'. However this approach to landscape as a 'way of seeing' or form of 'visual ideology' (1984; 1985; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Cosgrove 1993) has paradoxically served to reaffirm the centrality of sight in landscape study (Rose 2002; Wylie 2002; Wylie 2003; Wylie 2005; Rose 2006; Rose and Wylie 2006). Their approaches to landscape are problematic because they confine the idea of 'cultural landscape' to solely a representational domain, polarizing concepts of nature and culture and risking presenting an oddly 'disembodied' sense of landscape. While the Lakes and Peaks have historically been bound up with the representation and consumption of rural landscape as picturesque scenery, the interpretation and representation of these areas cannot be reduced to this visual cultural history. In fact

the second part of this chapter shows how in the eighteenth century, writers on romanticism, the picturesque and the sublime were also immersed in a debate on the nature of body-landscape encounters and the possibility of linguistic determination of such encounters a debate which finds echoes in contemporary ‘non-representational’ concerns outlined in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 develops a conceptualization of bodies and landscape that builds on the insights of ‘non-representational theory’ (NRT) (Thrift 1996;1997; 1999; 2000; 2003). NRT focuses on issues of practice, the neuro-biological, the habitual and the intuitive. I argue that it is a useful way in which to think through body-landscape encounters for it helps to reconcile phenomenological insights into the individual sensing body with insights into the disciplinary and ideological capacities of culture. It also moves us beyond Ingold’s phenomenologically inspired approach to landscape (which tends to encourage the researcher to ground meaning in the embodied subject) by showing how the embodied subject can no longer necessarily be used to ground meaning (cf. Varela, 1993). Rather body-landscape encounters involve variable combinations of material, ideological, discursive and neuro-biological forces. This means that a person with blindness is immersed in what William Connelly (2002) has referred to as ‘body-brain-culture relations’ and landscape is enacted and produced through these relations. In this conceptualization of body-landscape relations the experience of a disability such as blindness is not simply a product of an individual biological body or solely a socially constructed experience. Rather the embodied experience of disability is understood to emerge in relation to other bodies and the material landscape. (A process I explore in more depth in the empirical Chapters 6,7,8 and 9).

Chapter 3 addresses the theme of walking. In light of non-representational accounts of the body, the chapter outlines the potential ‘spaces of landscape’ and ‘spaces of the body’ which might be opened up by walking. Motives for walking in landscape are found to be irreducible to the visual apprehension of scenic landscape. The chapter reviews some Western traditions of walking practice from contemporary traditions of athletic endeavor, to pilgrimage, to the politicized urban and rural

walking practices of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Walking is shown to be motivated by a complex mix of corporeal, emotional, cultural and mental stimuli, which are historically and contextually variable, fuelled by anything from manufactured opiates to endorphins and collective political sentiments. I also show that through walking we can potentially walk outside of ‘conventional avenues’ of discourse (a concern of non-representational theorists).

Chapter 4 reviews some representations of blind experience and works to establish a critical context for the subsequent reading and deployment of blind interview and autobiographical testimony (found in the empirical section of this thesis). The chapter shows how the hypothetical and actual experiences of blindness have been the subject of philosophical debate since antiquity. Drawing on the work of Barasch (2003) on the representation of Blindness in Western thought and on the eighteenth century philosophical debates of Locke and Diderot inspired by the ‘Molyneux Question’ (regarding what the blind man restored to sight would ‘see’), I show how blindness and sightedness have been mutually defining. For example, blindness has been represented as a form of ignorance or punishment in opposition to the prioritization of sight and light in Western thought. Blindness has also been thought to enable forms of spiritual and philosophical insight – undisturbed by the potentially illusory faculty of sight. In the twentieth century advances in education and the social status of people with blindness means that they increasingly have gone about representing themselves in this debate, responding to longstanding negative stereotypes of blindness as simply a ‘lack’. I argue that while such representations are an interesting and useful insight into the individual lives and experiences of people with blindness, these representations cannot be taken as somehow providing authentic or unmediated commentary on blind sensory experience (a risk found in previous researchers uses of blind testimony on sensory experience). In fact to represent blind speech as the space of authentic testimony on sensory experience risks perpetuating a myth of people with blindness as having some sort of ‘inner vision’ or unmediated tactile relation with the physical world. It also risks ignoring the structuring capacities of culture, language and discourse that also work to produce blind testimony.

I argue that while it is important to consider evidence regarding how blind sensory experience might be considered ‘distinct’ from the sighted (for example through the use of echo-location or through cortical re-organization from a heavy reliance on the sense of touch) it is also important to think through the potential that those people with blindness have to express any such uniqueness through predominantly sighted discourse and act out their potentially unique experiences of place in a world structured predominantly by the sighted. For I find that *blind bodily and discursive experiences occur in an empathetic and experiential mesh with the bodies which surround them*. That is to say a blind person’s sense of embodiment and their use of language is inevitably bound up with the sighted, hence the thesis title ‘landscapes of sight and blindness’ (a topic which is elaborated in empirical chapters 6, 7, 8 & 9).

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological approach taken to the research. In the research I act as a sighted guide and take an in-depth ethnographic approach. While in line with the non-representational emphasis on practice, methods such as field noting, walking and talking, photography and video enable me to attend to what is done as well as what is said. A key method and point of reflection has been my own embodied practice acting as a sighted guide for the walking groups and I have woven this together with an ethnography of visually impaired walking groups together and insights from neurobiology in order to comment on the body-landscape encounters of walkers with blindness. The chapter works through issues of access, informed consent, research ethics, ethnography, interview practice, positionality, field noting and the collection and use of video and photographic data. Emphasis is placed on the how the researcher, the researcher’s theories of the world, the material topography, the practice of walking and the researched variously combine to generate answers to the research question: How do walkers with blindness experience landscape?

Chapter 6 is a photo essay that introduces the reader to a typical day’s walk with Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group (SVIWG). In this chapter I draw attention to everyday and habitual practices and talk which constitute the group in order to contextualize subsequent thematically ordered work. In so doing this chapter begins to show the interdependence between sighted guides and blind walking participants and how the physical and material challenges of a countryside setting can bring visual disability to the fore. In the second section of the chapter I reflect on

a video clip which details a particularly challenging moment in the walk for someone who has recently lost his sight. The clip foregrounds the skills which may need to be re-learned after sight loss in order to navigate country and city terrain. These challenges of blind countryside walking are found to render this practice (particularly for the uninitiated) analogous to an adventure sport such as climbing.

Chapter 7 explores empirical themes of seeing and visualizing landscape without sight. In the chapter I explore the tensions that occur between the visual apprehension of landscape as a collective practice and discourse and the individual experience of sight which occur in the experiences of walkers with blindness. The chapter reviews common sight conditions and shows how alongside light conditions they effect what is individually seen as the landscape. For visually impaired walkers it is found that priority is given to modes of looking and visualizing which enabled navigation rather than appreciation of the terrain – the rough terrain of the lakes and peaks without sight requires considerable focus on the feet (a topic of Chapter 8). I also explore the relations between walkers and guides and show how sight-vision is not only dependant on the physical capacity of the eye but is also dependent on an intertwining of memory, imagination, the external world and guides descriptions. Thus for walkers with blindness processes of seeing and visualizing landscape come about through past and present experiences, their interdependence with sighted others and the current physical properties of both their eyes and the light in the landscape.

Chapter 8 reflects on blind walkers' sense of touch and their statements about blind tactile impression. I argue that people with blindness' talk of touch force us to confront tensions evident in any research project which attempts to represent the embodied experiences of others. These tensions occur between landscape as it is experienced by the individual differently embodied person and landscape as it is collectively interpreted and understood through language. This tension is crucial because both the researcher and those with blindness are likely to be situated in the middle of that tension, negotiating, mocking, and submitting to certain common ideas of landscape and blindness. In particular I show how people with blindness drew attention to the tactile impressions of their feet, subverting a predominant association of tactile intellect with the hand. This talk of the feet occurred in both interviews and out walking. The insights build on the photo essay in Chapter 6 which

drew attention to how feet are an essential element for navigating the terrain. This chapter also builds on the insights of Chapter 4 which began to establish a critical context in which to read blind interview testimony about touch. The foot-focused talk of walkers is thought to emerge for practical reasons and also for socio-cultural reasons - potentially subverting more tricky or taboo tactile topics.

In Chapter 9 I argue in the wake of NRT, the concept of landscape may incorporate the sounds of laughter, for laughter blurs body-landscape distinctions. In the chapter I illustrate some specific instances of humour and laughter amongst the walking group participants, including how humour and laughter occurred in response to fear, the slapstick and the surprising; to cope with stereotyping and subvert any notion that people with blindness or visual impairment should be the object of pity. Humour also worked to translate tragedy into comedy and to ease interview tensions and manage expectations of the research situation including the disjuncture between expectations of a 'formal' recorded interview and what actually happened in practice. Landscape deviates under the force of this laughter, for the reverberations of laughter penetrate other people blurring perceived body boundaries and throwing into question once more what constitutes the 'materiality' of the landscape and the 'experience' of blindness.

Research contribution

This thesis makes three key contributions to knowledge. Firstly, the research occupies new empirical ground, for no one has researched blind walkers' experiences of the countryside before. Academic research on blindness in geographical disciplines to date has been limited to the socio-spatial experiences of disability in urban areas (Butler 1994; Butler and Bowlby 1997; Allen and Milner 2003; Allen 2004; Allen 2004), a recent PhD Thesis on blind golf (McEwen, 2000), and some work in humanistic geography on the phenomenological experience of blindness in urban environments (Hill 1985; Cook 1992). The most consistent engagement with issues raised by blindness in Geography is by blind geographer Reginald Golledge who does applied research aimed at developing tactile and audio mapping, navigation and orientation aids for people who are blind like himself (Golledge 1992;

Kitchin, Blades et al. 1997; Golledge 1999) (work which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

My own research represents a departure from this predominant focus on the urban experiences of people with blindness and instead presents some of the unique experiences and understandings of members of specialist blind and visually impaired walking groups who visit areas such as the Lake District and Peak District. In the thesis I reveal some of the ways in which landscape is encountered and experienced through an individual's visual impairment and collective forms of seeing and visualizing through touch - in particular the touch of the feet and through laughter and humour which serves to dispel fears, subvert stereotypes and manage dependent relationships between blind and visually impaired walkers and their sighted guides.

Secondly, uniqueness in this thesis flows from the theoretical perspective adopted. Through building on work on landscape and the body emergent in the wake of non-representational theory, I have refined a quite distinct theoretical-empirical approach to researching issues of landscape experience. In particular, I advocate an approach to landscape research which takes into account: a) the processual, intuitive and collective aspects of body-landscape encounter; b) how an embodied practice such as walking can open up particular aspects of landscape inquiry; c) the limits of personal testimony about embodied experience and d) recent neurobiological insights into the nature of embodied experience.

Thirdly, the thesis advocates and demonstrates a distinct style of going about social research that attempts to expose the ground upon which both the researchers and researched can make statements about their experience. I do this by weaving together ethnographic fieldnotes, interview testimony, insights from neurobiology and reflections on discourse and by drawing attention to the performative, paradoxical and contradictory elements of the research process. In sum, I hope that this thesis is an exemplar for research on body-landscape encounter through the way in which attends to and honours the difficulties of such research, difficulties which make us question our established categories of thought about landscape and established modes of going about and presenting social research.

Chapter 1 – Landscape as visual apprehension



Photo 1.1 Members of Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group on Kinder Scout in the Peak District, August 2004

Synopsis

In both popular and academic imaginaries, the concept of landscape has had a persistent association with seeing and the sense of sight. This may seem to render blind people a paradoxical presence in this academic territory of inquiry and the material territory of Lake and Peak landscape. In this chapter, I review this association of landscape with the visual apprehension of space. The first part of the chapter reviews some popular approaches to the landscape concept that treat landscape as primarily about visual apprehension. However, a notion of landscape as a form of 'visual ideology', developed in new cultural geography, means we cannot reduce the concept of landscape to an individual's visual apprehension, for visual cultures of landscape can extend beyond the individual and the observable and can work as a powerful structuring force.

The second section of this chapter involves a re-reading of eighteenth century literature on landscape and shows how landscape was not only constructed as an object to be gazed upon, but was also involved in a debate amongst Romantic theorists of the sublime over our capacity to walk outside of discourse and be overwhelmed through our encounters with landscape. In these ways I show how the concept of landscape has continually involved raising questions about how we go about representing a person's experience of landscape and how people are subjected to and resist powerful social forces. As we turn to Chapter 2, 'Landscapes and bodies in the wake of non-representational theory', these facets of the landscape debate are important to recognize for they share continuities with more recent non-representational approaches.

Landscape's associations with seeing and the sense of sight

Ethnographer of Lake District Walking Groups

If there is one overarching reason why people would choose to push themselves very hard physically, often under unpleasant or even downright nasty conditions, it seems to be the glorious spectrum of views

(Darby 2000, 213)

Volunteer peak park ranger

When they first told me that this visually impaired group were coming to walk in the national park and visit the centre, I thought they were joking you know? (Laughs) I suppose I just thought... Why bother? I mean normally... well as park guides we point out landscape features, natural history and the like. I suppose I just wondered what we were going to have to do and why they were coming.

(Field notes, 22nd April, 2004)

Jim, Congenitally blind walker

Right, what I understand by the word landscape is that it is a view, a visual view of an area of land that you can see, as to what it means to me, it doesn't mean a lot to me since I have never been able to see; I have been blind since birth. So I don't really have a perception of what a landscape is ...I don't have a concept of scenery since it is completely visual.

(Interview, 14th August 2004, p1)

Professor at a conference after I had just given a paper

I still don't understand what blind people have to do with landscape.

(Inter-disciplinary landscape conference, The Netherlands, June 15th 2004)

For some academics, park guides and blind and visually impaired research participants the idea of researching blind people's experiences of landscape has seemed paradoxical, bewildering and even funny. Such reactions seem to derive from the association of landscape with the visual apprehension of space, evident in both popular and academic renderings of the landscape concept, and an 'ocular-centric' (Jay1994) view of knowledge which conflates sight with knowledge – the 'eye' with the 'I'. While a person's affection for looking at rural English landscape scenery is not necessarily normal or right (see for example Agnew 1998) and we cannot presume a particular culture, institution or mode of representation will always proceed the construction and interpretation of the material landscape (Tolia-Kelly

2006)⁸ the persistent associations of landscape in the west with forms of visual apprehension still have the potential to impinge upon how people with blindness may interpret themselves as subjects in the landscape and how they are interpreted by fellow visitors to the Lakes and Peaks. It is a visuality that may render people with blindness a paradoxical presence in the Peaks and Lakes. This was a paradox that myself as a researcher found an appealing starting point for a piece of research. It was also a paradox that blind walkers themselves were clearly not alien to, for they joked with me about what on earth they were doing in these scenic areas, about looking odd to fellow walkers, about what wildlife and topography they had 'seen' that day and why someone from a landscape department would come and talk to them (see Chapter 9 on laughter).

I will, therefore, review some of the ways in which landscape has come to be associated with visual apprehension. I will do this through attending to some approaches to landscape from within cultural geography of the past few decades and to some of the specific visualities that have come to be associated with the Lakes and Peaks. Examples are taken from the Lakes and the Peaks as they are the main locations of my ethnographies and are also key to the construction of landscape as scenery to behold however these areas cannot be conflated, containing different topographies and their own particular histories of engagement (see for example Shoard 1982).

⁸ For example the Chinese have a long history of valorising, painting and theorizing relations with nature which can be traced to Chinese emperors of 3 B.C.(Solnit, 2000). Wandering in the mountains was found to be highly valued by the early Chinese, and is regarded as an essential activity for the vocation of a painter. While in the Western tradition of landscape painting there is a stress on self's identification with what is other than self and landscape is understood as an external presence, in the Chinese tradition there is a necessity of internalizing landscape - landscape is a personal burden. As Casey explains, 'the ancient painter identifies...with the landscape through which he wanders for years in preparation for painting; the purpose of the wandering is not just to note and observe but to make himself one with what he has moved through...Moreover this identification involves a strong factor of internalization, even to the point of pathology: the serious painters of previous centuries, says Shen Kua (A.D. 1031-95), '...had streams and rocks in their vitals, and clouds and mists as a chronic illness.' (Casey 2002, 107).

Contemporary geographical conceptions of landscape

In academia landscape continues to be a contested term⁹, however, one persistent feature of the landscape concept is a connection with seeing and the sense of sight. This is evident in environmental psychologist's theories of 'landscape preference' where landscape is understood to primarily be apprehended through the physical faculty of sight (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989; Ward-Thompson 1998; Bell 2001)¹⁰ and in Appleton's (1974) evolutionary 'Prospect-refuge theory' where the way we see landscape is grounded in a visual field of violence. It is also evident in geographical approaches where for geographer Jackson, the landscape is 'a portion of the earth's surface that can be comprehended at a glance' (Jackson 1984, 3) while in Cosgrove's (1984) early work 'Landscape is not merely the world we see; it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world'(13). This association of landscape with the visual apprehension of space can be partly attributed to a Western European ocular-centric view of knowledge which has a tendency to prioritize vision over other senses. As Jay writes 'Whether or not one gives greater weight to technical advances or social changes, it is ...evident that the dawn of the modern era was accompanied by a vigorous privileging of vision.' (Jay 1994, 69)¹¹.

Evidence for a privileging of vision in Western European thought can be found in the numerous ocular metaphors which litter the language. In the English language point of view, outlook, prospect, scope, keeping an eye, illuminating, and foreseeable are just some of the words which connect seeing with knowing and the 'eye' with the subject 'I'. This privileging of vision has occurred through developments in

⁹ Mikesell (1968) suggests that in its Old English form the term Landscape (*landscipe*) referred to 'a district owned by a lord' or inhabited by a specific group of people. While Yi-fu Tuan (2002) suggests landscape's root meaning is a 'land shaped by people' where 'scape' offers a variant spelling of the word shape.

¹⁰ It is important to note that some landscape research in geography and some recent 'landscape preference' research acknowledges other sensory factors in landscape experience such as tactile and olfactory sensation (Porteous 1985; Kroh and Gimblett 1992; Thwaites 2001) and 'soundscapes' (Porteous and Mastin 1985; Hedfors and Berg 2003). However, this sensory landscape research remains somewhat limited for it tends to continue to reduce human sensation to a visual mappable landscape. A recent example of this visualized approach to landscape sensation can be found in the 'tranquillity mapping project' of Macfarlane et al. (2005) this project echoes earlier attempts by Grano (1929) in his work 'Pure Geography' to map human sensations onto the landscape. However one person's tranquillity (for example cockerels crowing) is another's irritation. Landscape sensation is to some extent relative and bound to the human subject and cannot necessarily be mapped onto a visual landscape.

¹¹ While geographers such as Cosgrove set out to critique this view of knowledge in some ways he paradoxically reaffirmed its centrality (cf. Cosgrove 2003).

perspectival representation (Cosgrove, 1984) and other scientific and technological developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. These include; the empirical isolation of the eye as an object of scientific attention by ophthalmologists; the development of certain optical devices like the camera obscura and the stereoscope which aided the rationalization of human sight; and the increasing re-production of imagery since the second half of the nineteenth century which place an increasing emphasis on the modality of sight as a means of creating and storing and retrieving visual information and culture (Crary 1992). While such prioritizations of vision do not effect people in uniform ways, it is still important to understand that landscape concepts in geography have developed alongside this more general tendency in Western thought to prioritize vision. For example, walking up to a point of observation in order to achieve an elevated interpretation of the world has traditionally been a key component of the geographical field course - a means through which authoritative accounts of what is 'out there' in 'the field' can be achieved (Lorimer 2003). This is also a reminder of the able bodied requirements of geographical fieldwork as it is traditionally practised (Hall and Healey 2002) and the equation of ascent with knowledge, height with superiority, which underpins traditional geographical epistemologies associated with the gaze of the fieldworker geography (Rose 1993; Rose 1997).

Geographers and landscape historians have documented a range of visually orientated encounters with the material and represented landscape, where a concern has been with landscape as a system of signification and landscape as a set of situated and embodied modes of looking. Work which focuses on landscape as a system of signification and interpretation includes: work on the reification of landscape's visuality in the 1930s and 40s through the use of scenic landscape imagery in maps, books and nature writing (Brace 2003); the satisfactions and disappointments of seeing first hand areas of constructed visibility re-produced in postcards, guidebooks, paintings (Bell and Lyall 2002); the way in which the English country code encourages looking at landscape in a quiet, passive Romantic manner echoing earlier forms of Romantic landscape connoisseurship (Macnaghten and Urry 1998) and how particular visions of English landscape have been used to re-enforce a rhetoric of nationhood (see for example, Agnew 1998).

Geographers have also focused on the situated, embodied practices of looking at landscape. That is, landscape as a mode of visual practice. For example, research has explored: the relations between aesthetic ideals of landscape and a phenomenology of male desire (Jarvis 1994; Rose 1992; Rose 1993; Nash 1996); the adoption of a popular culture of 'outlook geography' and amateur naturalism typified by the 'I-spy' guides in the 1930s and 40s and the way in which this disciplinary landscape gaze was turned inward to the body and used to assess appropriate dress, clothing and conduct, fitness and suitability to be in the countryside (Matless 1996); how walkers shift their landscape gaze depending on the weather and the practices they are involved in from 'wide screen' at the base of a mountain to the close reading and coordination of the path, map, compass/GPS and topography as walking conditions change during the course of a mountain ascent (Lorimer and Lund 2003). Such contemporary research explorations into landscape as a mode of visual practice begin to acknowledge some of the ways in which the body is implicated in the reproduction of landscape discourse. They stem from a series of theoretical traditions in geography which treat landscape as a mode of visual apprehension. These include humanistic, post-structural and feminist traditions of landscape scholarship.

Humanistic approaches to landscape as bound to the human subject

Humanistic approaches to landscape attempted to combat the realist values with which the concept had previously been loaded. In the 1970s humanists such as Yi-fu Tuan (1974), Donald Meinig (1979) and Edward Relph (1981) argued for a view of landscape that took the human imagination into account. Such a concern became popular in the late 70's and 80's as a result of UK and the US geographers reacting to the positivist basis of much human geography. Such humanistic work represented a radical departure from the idea, popular with geographers of the period, of viewing landscape as solely an objective space. It also departed from historical geographers work which concerned the reconstruction of past landscapes from maps and fieldwork (see for example Hoskins 1988). Humanistic approaches inspired by phenomenology share some continuity with contemporary non-representational concerns (see for example Seamon and Mugaerauer 1985). However, in much humanistic work a focus remained on the way in which landscape is a mode of visual apprehension. For example, for Meinig 'Landscape is defined by our vision and

interpreted by our minds' (Meinig 1979, 3). For humanistic geographers information about landscape was relative and bound to the human subject (Grano and Paasi 1929; Tuan 1974; Meinig 1979; Tuan 1979; Jackson 1980; Relph 1981; Porteous 1985; Porteus 1993). There was a focus on signification and the aesthetic, literary, linguistic, ethical and historical meanings of landscape (Ley and Samuels 1978, 11).

Today there remains some prominent practitioners of what could still be labelled humanistic or behavioural geography (Porteus 1993; Tuan 1993) and such humanistic work remains a popular inspiration for landscape architects where it is referred to as 'experiential landscape studies' (Thwaites 2001). However, as a set of approaches through which to understand the way in which landscape comes into being, humanistic geography remains lacking; for its use of phenomenological approaches has tended to rest on an assumption of a individuated human subject who apprehends the landscape through either sight or other senses (this notion of the subject is critiqued in Chapter 2 and replaced with a sense of a body-subject, emergent through its interactions with the world and others). From the 1980s onwards such work has largely been superseded by a range of approaches emergent from critical social theory, feminism and post structuralism. However, the priority given by humanistic geographers to the personal and subjective continues to resonate with some feminist and non-representational concerns.

Landscape as a 'visual ideology'

In academic geography landscape has continued to be associated with ideas of visual apprehension, and this is largely due to the popularity of Cosgrove's critical concept of landscape as a 'way of seeing' or form of 'visual ideology' (Cosgrove, 1984).

Cosgrove's work represented a radical departure from ideas of landscape as objective space and from humanistic notions of landscape as residing in the individual subject. In a series of books and articles influenced by Western Marxist thought, Cosgrove treated landscape as a way of seeing and ordering societies and environments for ideological purposes¹² (Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove 1985; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988;

¹² In his canonical text 'Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape' Cosgrove, D. (1984) traces the emergence of the landscape idea as 'a way of seeing' to Italy and the Italian Renaissance and interprets the idea as being theorized and developed in response to the emergence of European capitalism. Here the key to the capitalist demand for order and control over their environment was the

Cosgrove 1993). Here the material and represented landscape was understood to occlude the reality of underlying socio-economic relationships¹³. This argument was designed to counterbalance the over individualizing interpretations of landscape which were emerging from humanistic geography of the period (see for example Meinig 1979; Relph 1981) and the persistent treatment of landscape as objective mappable space, evident in the imagination of many physical and human geographer's of the period. It was an approach to landscape which recognized the importance of inequality and ideology in our representations of landscape and built upon work in cultural studies such as Berger's 'Ways of seeing' (Berger 1972) and the work of Marxist critic Raymond Williams 'The country and the city' (Williams 1973) and the work of Lowenthal and Prince who analyzed the impact of class and national identity on the creation of material landscape (Lowenthal and Prince 1964). For Cosgrove (1984),

...landscape represents a historically specific way of experiencing the world developed by, and meaningful to, certain social groups. Landscape, I shall argue, is an ideological concept. It represents a way in which certain classes of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature, and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role (15)

Cosgrove's work proves significant for this thesis for two key reasons. Firstly, Cosgrove shows that landscape cannot be reduced to an *individual's* visual apprehension. Rather, landscape can be understood as an ideology, discourse, collective culture and mode of representation, which has the potential to structure

deployment of newly found perspectival techniques, where the advent of central point perspective in Renaissance Italy made it possible to represent expansive high views and deep vistas in mathematically correct terms. He points out that this new way of seeing was not an amoral or depoliticised phenomenon for it placed man at the centre of representational space and created a separation between subject and object, directing a universal reality at a single spectator. Accurate perspectival vision became reified as the route to truth,. 'Perspective was regarded not merely as a technique, a visual device, but as truth itself, the discovery of an objective property of space rather than solely of vision.' (1984, 22). In this way Cosgrove conflates landscape with ocular-centric thought a point also made by Wylie (2005).

¹³ It is worth noting that while Cosgrove attributes the development of a distant objectifying form of landscape vision to modernist developments in painting and perspectival techniques, However Crary (1992) argues that a new type of observer was formed prior to such modernist developments in painting through other 'greyer' philosophical, scientific and technological practices and discourses.

people's lives. Therefore, Cosgrove extends the concept of landscape beyond the individual and makes it a potentially relevant cultural force for those with little or no sight. Secondly, for some geographers Cosgrove's 'way of seeing' approach has become almost synonymous with the term 'landscape' providing a conceptual framework subsequently mimicked in numerous analyses of English landscape representation, taste and experience (Bermingham 1994; Schama 1995; Agnew 1998; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Darby 2000; McMillan 2000; Mitchell 2000; Mitchell 2003; Nash 2005). Lilley even suggests that '...to read of landscape in recent UK and US geography textbooks makes it all too clear that landscape as a 'way of seeing' has won the day' (Lilley 2004). However, Chapters 1 and 2 combine to make the point that while Cosgrove's interpretation of landscape as visual ideology continues to be a *potentially significant* element of the landscape concept; *landscape cannot be reduced to ideas of visual ideology*. Thus, while Cosgrove's approach remains an important way in which to critique approaches to landscape which continue to load the concept with realist visual values, we cannot limit our analysis of walker's with blindness' experience of landscape to visual ideology (Chapter 2 develops this point through reflecting on the insights of phenomenology and non-representational theory).

It is also important to note how approaches to landscape as a 'way of seeing' in Geography also paralleled and overlapped with geographical work which treated landscape as text. This work drew upon the post-structural literary theory of Roland Barthes and developed the metaphor of landscape-as-text in order to 'decode' the cultural construction of landscape (Duncan and Duncan 1988; Barnes and Duncan 1992)¹⁴. Feminist Gillian Rose critiqued this work arguing that such constructions actually help to re-establish a 'masculine authoritative reading' (Rose, 1993;1994)¹⁵.

¹⁴ In their book Barnes and Duncan (1992) contend that '... 'text' is also an appropriate trope to use in analyzing landscapes because it conveys the inherent instability of meaning, fragmentation or absence of integrity, lack of authorial control, polyvocality and irresolvable social contradiction that often characterize them' (33).

¹⁵ This issue was given attention by Gillian Rose, first in an essay on 'Geography as a science of observation' (Rose 1992) and subsequently in her book *Feminism and Geography* (Rose 1993). Rose translates John Berger's critique of the masculine gaze at the nude within Western art to the pleasurable gaze of the geographer in the field and reveals the gendered social relations between the implicitly male observer and the feminized landscape. She highlights a contradiction latent in geography's treatment of landscape, between the production of knowledge on the one hand, and the disruptive pleasures of looking which might 'seduce' or compromise the masculine integrity of such

However, despite this critique, a number of commentators continue to read landscape as a text or way of seeing and consider the ways in which textual, photographic, artistic and historical landscapes 'script' encounters (Urry 1990; Edensor 1998; Bell and Lyall 2002). This follows an approach which accepts that '...it is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape' (Schama 1995, 11). Some researchers of tourism even go so far as to suggest that representations preclude the possibility of an 'original encounter':

Natural landmarks...have been photographed from every angle and under every condition to titillate the tourist appetite...On arrival at the site, the visitor is denied a serendipitous or fresh view; appreciation of the view has already been prescribed. So the journey becomes something of a pilgrimage to see, in reality that which is already familiar.

(Bell and Lyall 2002, 16)

Such a conception of landscape as a 'way of seeing' or 'cultural construction' which *inevitably* intervenes in our interpretation of the world is utilised by anthropologist Darby (2000) in her recent ethnography of walking groups in the Lake District. It is an approach which results in her conclusion (quoted at the start of this chapter), that the joy taken in the view is the ultimate motivation for walkers and a result of 400 years of cultivating certain tastes for scenic landscape. This includes an inheritance of vocabulary, actions and thought which 'filter' people's perceptions of the material topography. It is a historical/representational explanation of landscape echoed in many historical and research based texts on landscape (Andrews 1989; Ousby 1990; Harrison 1991; Schama 1995).

However, while landscapes may be subject to a high degree of textualization, guides, and reification, this does not necessarily fully account for the experiences we have in the material landscape¹⁶. In fact, approaches which limit their explanation of

scientific 'truth'. In so doing, Rose questions the legibility of landscape and highlights the significance of our gendered corporeality in looking at landscape.

¹⁶ This is an argument which has also been made by Mitch Rose (2002) who points out that approaches to landscape as 'text' or 'way of seeing' rely on the idea of hegemonic cultural filters. This reliance exposes a 'latent structuralism' for it establishes '....landscape as a constituting force, structuring landscape's interpretation and given form' (455-467).

landscape experience, or explain the popularity of certain landscapes via such representations, are in danger of conflating landscape representation with actual embodied landscape encounter. In so doing, they unwittingly re-produce a notion of landscape as a distanced, reflective and objectifying mode of seeing (cf. Wylie 2003) and reduce human motivation and knowledge to vision and representation. Interestingly this is a point that Cosgrove (2003) has recently conceded in his essay 'Landscape and the European sense of sight'. Thus, while ideas of landscape as visual ideology or text may be politically useful and theoretically applicable in certain contexts, it is not the only way in which we should go about conceptualizing landscape. Other ways in which we can achieve this are a topic of Chapter 2, however in this chapter I turn to the ways in which landscape in Britain came to be associated with scenery to behold.

Landscape as scenery to behold

While it is problematic to attribute people's motivations for visiting areas of constructed visibility such as the Lakes and Peaks as solely to do with their previous representational forms, this does not mean we should ignore the representational context of the Lakes and Peaks altogether¹⁷. Ideas of landscape as scenery still *potentially* impinge upon visitors, even visitors who are blind. Therefore, I turn to some of the ways in which key Romantic figures have helped in the formation of a scenic landscape concept which is still thought to be popular with many visitors to the Lakes and Peaks today (Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Darby 2000).

It is necessary to turn to the period between approximately 1600 and 1850 in order to begin to understand the development of landscape tourism and the uptake of a concept of landscape as 'scenery'. This period witnessed the expansion of the British Empire, transport and industrial revolutions, urbanization, the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars. It was in this historic period that a developing taste for landscape scenery emerged, influenced by the European travels of the 'grand tourists', the development of perspectival representation, architectural discourse and

¹⁷ This argument shares continuities with the arguments of Castree and Macmillan (2004) who suggest that in the wake of non-representational theory we must avoid getting carried away with novelty and continue to take representational contexts seriously.

early theatre scenery (Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove 1985; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Agnew 1998; Olwig 2002), the poets, writers, painters, theoreticians and explorers of the eighteenth century (Andrews 1989; Ousby 1990; Bermingham 1994; Labbe 1998) and as a form of imperial ideology occurring in response to and part of the drive of voyages of exploration (Mitchell 1994; Schama 1995).

From the seventeenth century onwards, tours of Britain became progressively more popular amongst a British aristocratic and upper-class elite and cultures of gazing upon the landscape, walking to reach the best view and debating its aesthetic qualities developed, extended outwards, and eventually transformed from their elite origins. This meant that while Defoe on a tour of the Lake District in 1724 referred to the area as ‘barren and frightful’¹⁸, by the late eighteenth century, a culture of landscape connoisseurship had developed which turned the Lakes into a desirable scenic area to visit and the term ‘frightful’ into a positive appraisal of the sublime qualities of landscape. Early Lake and Peak tourists developed a new language for wild nature and pictorial modes of apprehending the scene (Andrews 1989). This language included the use of terms such as ‘landscape’, ‘picturesque’, ‘sublime’ and ‘horrid beauty’ to appraise the visual qualities of areas and an array of sensations such views evoked. This touristic focus on the visual in the landscape reflected wider changes in the culture of travel and tourism which placed an increasing emphasis since the seventeenth century on the eye over the ear (Adler 1989) an emphasis which is thought to signify an enlightenment ambition to elevate humans from nature and prioritize a rationality distinct from our more proximal, emotional and intuitive senses (Ingold 2004)(see also Chapter 8).

One major influence on the development of a scenic conception of landscape is the interplay between the material landscape of home/empire and the landscape represented in paintings. Until the eighteenth century in Britain, landscape painting held an inferior position in hierarchies of artistic genres; landscapes were either a means of topographical record or served as decorative backdrop and early eighteenth century commissioners tended to prefer portraits or historical paintings (Andrews,

¹⁸ Daniel Defoe, in 1724, referring to the Lake District as ‘the wildest, most barren and frightful, of any that I have passed over in England, or even in Wales itself’ Cited in Andrews, M. (1989). The Search for the Picturesque. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.

1989). However, by the late eighteenth century, painting of landscape for its own sake began to rise in status. This interest can be attributed to swelling British nationalism; the connections between landscape art and the right to exercise political authority, foreign interest in British landscapes¹⁹ and the growth in the 'Grand Tours' which contributed to a taste for both landscape art and material landscapes (Barrel 1990; Darby 2000).

With improvements in transport from 1700 onwards, travel to Europe from England increased significantly. This was particularly the case amongst the landed young male elite for whom a visit to Italy on their grand tour of Europe was essential. Through the sights they saw, paintings and prints they returned with and books they wrote, these early English visitors to Italy developed landscape tastes and relayed them to those who stayed at home²⁰. In this way Italian landscape and landscape art are thought to have become key influences in the development of English landscape tastes and a notion of landscape as scenery (Manwaring 1965, originally published 1925). Drawing upon the influences of Italian landscape painters such as Claude Lorraine, formulaic approaches to landscape painting developed in this period utilizing principles of perspectival representation (Schama 1995) and paintings commissioned by wealthy landed gentry are found to have naturalized patterns of masculine authority, property and privilege (Rose 1993; Nash 2005). There was also a growing metropolitan market and audience for landscape paintings. For example artists such as JMW Turner (1775-1851) toured the North of England filling exhibitions in London with picturesque and sublime images of landscape (Ousby 1990).

The landscape scenery of late eighteenth century theatre is also thought to have encouraged the treatment of material topography as a spectacle of landscape to behold (Darby 2000, 34). A number of prominent landscape painters of the period also painted landscape scenery for the theatre assisting the entrance of the terms 'landscape' and 'scenery' into common English usage and aiding the popularization of a cult of scenic landscape tourism. The term landscape is thought to first have

¹⁹ For example, in 1773 the empress of Russia commissioned a vast table service decorated with views of British scenery and this was put on exhibition in London the following year (Andrews 1989).

²⁰ Such travel not only embodied aesthetic theory, it also became key ideological apparatus of empire (Mitchell 1994).

entered Renaissance theatre through architectural discourse. Specifically, the reworking of Vitruvius' treatise '*de Architectura*', available in Rome from 1486²¹. Vitruvius suggested that the different modes of theatre (tragic, comic and satiric) should be played against different architectural elements of public buildings (Darby 2000; Olwig 2002). His scenic recommendations, were first introduced to the English stage by Inigo Jones (1573-1652) who was commissioned to design the stage set for Ben Jonson's play 'The Masque of Blackness' in 1605. This is thought to be one of the earliest uses of the term landscape in modern English. It was also the first use of stage scenery with central point perspective in England enabling new illusions of landscape to be brought to the stage (Olwig 2002).

The theatre not only assisted the development of landscape terminology, it also increased the circulation of images of landscape and bolstered the popularity of rural and exotic scenes for a largely urban dwelling audience (Urry 1994). Landscape painters of the period painted realistic landscape scenery for the theatre and sources for this realism included the Pacific voyages of discovery (Mitchell 1994) as well as domestic landscape imagery (Andrews 1989). The best known of these landscape painters was Philip di Louthembourg who was employed as a scenery designer for pantomimes at the Drury Lane Theatre. In 1778 he travelled to the Peak District in order to study for the following year's pantomime at Drury Lane 'The wonders of Derbyshire'. The scenery was developed as a panorama rather than having wings and it is thought that the plot was developed simply as a pretext for a number of changes in scenery (Joppien 1973, cited in Darby 2000, 33). Such scenic paintings fuelled the anticipation of the audience for the real landscape scenes they might one day get to behold.

A growing circulation of landscape paintings and theatrical scenes of landscape contributed to the popularity of scenic landscape travel amongst the privileged elites and a growing middle class. When Napoleonic wars and political unrest in Europe meant that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the Grand Tour became almost impractical and attention concentrated on domestic tourism including the Lakes and Peaks (Bell and Lyall 2002). However, travel by coach would have been

²¹ This treatise was a comprehensive ordering of architectural spaces of the period, with guidance on style, proportion, construction, decoration and meaning.

rough and tortuously slow, at times requiring considerable periods on foot (Amato 2004). This means that early English travellers are thought to have embarked on their ventures not for the journey itself, but for the destination and points of observation that the journey enabled. The tourist journey is thought to have been something to be endured and tourist enjoyment is thought to have resided in the accumulation of observations taken at successive points of rest (Wallace 1993). In this account walking was simply a mode through which to reach a point of observation from which to survey the landscape as scenery.

However, early cultures of appraising landscape were not limited solely to vision. Visitors also came for the sounds, smells and associated health benefits of a visit to the picturesque countryside. Boats took visitors up and down the lakes and ‘...for a price, fired off cannons so one could hear distant waterfalls in the extraordinary silence that followed after the shattering echoes had finished reverberating off the mountains’ (Darby 2000, 61). French horns were sometimes taken aboard pleasure boats as their sounds were found to be distorted by different landforms (Andrews 1989) and harpists, including one blind harpist, accompanied the ultimate sublime adventures of early Welsh landscape tourists (Schama 1995). Rather than being unwitting dupes of a visual landscape taste defined by an elite, early walkers and visitors to the lakes were involved in the construction and further development of diverse landscape experiences. While early pedestrian movements of the Romantics are also thought to have brought with them their own ‘peripatetic’ forms of knowledge more concerned with paths and processes of movement than static points of observation (Jarvis 1997) (a point I will turn to in Chapter 3 on walking).

A wealthy few in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not only able to visit scenic landscapes such as the Lakes but commission landscape paintings and transform their estates to conform to their scenic landscape ideals. The spread of landed estates had been enabled through processes of enclosure and gentrification allowing landscape vistas to be reshaped by an elite (Bunce 1994) (Jackson 1980)²²

²² One culmination of this metaphor of Landscape was the London based publication of ‘*Nouveau theatre de la Grande Bretagne*’ (Kip and Knyff 1708). This document contained a set of bird’s eye view prints of country properties, where subscriptions were paid by members of the nobility and aristocracy to ensure their country seats were drawn and engraved (Darby 2000, 18). Further editions

and for many of the wealthy merchants and landed nobility the power to see and organize an extensive prospect became connected to the ability to govern. Correct taste for scenic landscape was used as a means of legitimating political authority and the panoramic gaze tended to be placed in opposition to the lowland, restricted view of labourers, who supposedly viewed the land for only their own interest (Barrel 1990). Thus, estates were reshaped and this involved major landscape works including (paradoxically) the physical clearance of poverty in sight of the property. Most famously this was achieved by banker Henry Hoare who commissioned the redesign of his property at Stourhead utilizing Palladian principles²³. Hoare was one of a whole new class of wealthy merchants and landed nobility who vied to outdo one another in the building of their estates. In Hoare's case these works were funded on profits relating to the slave trade abroad.

Picturesque and sublime landscape

Two terms which were key to the development of a scenic concept of landscape in the eighteenth century were the 'sublime' and the 'picturesque'. What is interesting about the history of these terms is, firstly, that it reveals some of the specific ways in which landscape became codified as scenery to behold, and secondly, it reveals some of the ways in which even in the eighteenth century these codifications were subject to satire, subverted, and in the case of the sublime discussed with reference to the need for an excessive theory of the subject. Thus even in the eighteenth century, landscape was embroiled in a debate about embodied landscape encounter, discourse and the limits of representation; a point which some recent theories of landscape in the wake of non-representational theory appear to overlook (Chapter 2).

The category of the picturesque tended to be associated with what was deemed a picture-worthy scene and implied a '...gentle, feminized unthreatening nature' (Andrews 1989, 132). The distant and elevated viewpoint of the picturesque was

were produced through the 1720s in a period when mercantile wealth was increasingly buying into these aristocratic privileges.

²³ The Palladian landscape became a hugely influential source of ideas and motifs for the making of landscape in eighteenth century Northern Europe and America. 'Palladianism' was a style developed from Andrea Palladio's (1508 -80) interpretations of Roman architecture in the Veneto region of Italy. Vitruvius' treatise '*De Architectura*' was central to Palladio's style. Palladio incorporated principles of single-point perspective into the construction of whole environments and for him, like his followers the Italian landscape became 'a great stage upon which he made his designs' (Cosgrove 1993).

both class specific and highly gendered²⁴ and is thought to have encouraged a ‘...discourse of disinterested disembodiment’ (Gilroy 2000, 5). The sublime was also gendered but tended to be associated with wilder more overwhelming or frightening forms of nature. Where sublime terminology such as ‘horrid beauty’, ‘frightful’, ‘awful’, ‘terrific’ and ‘stupendous’ enabled areas which were previously regarded as wild and barren to become re-evaluated (Ousby 1990, 137). Such sublime terminology was developed and popularized through Burke’s ‘enquiry’ (Burke 1757), early visitors to the Derbyshire Peak district²⁵ and early Grand Tours of Europe which included the Alps²⁶.

The first guidebook to treat the Lake District as a place of picturesque mountain scenery was ‘*A guide to the Lakes*’ written in 1778 by, Jesuit Priest Thomas West. This text remained in print as a definitive guide for the Lake District tourist, for almost 50 years (Darby 2000). Sublime and picturesque terminologies for landscape were also popularized by Oxford graduate and school headmaster turned Vicar William Gilpin (1724-1804). Between 1782 and 1802 he published guided tours of rural Britain which were aimed outside of Oxbridge elite, provided translations of Latin terms and taught the picturesque tourist ‘...how to look at the natural landscape as an ordered, pictorial whole’ (Bermingham 1994). For Gilpin appreciation of the picturesque required more than just looking. He states, ‘the art of sketching is to the picturesque traveller what the art of writing is to the scholar. Each is equally necessary to fix and communicate its respective ideas’ (Gilpin 1792). West and Gilpin’s guides were superseded by William Wordsworth’s ‘*A description of the Scenery of the Lakes*’ (later re-titled ‘*A guide to the lakes*’) in 1822. Wordsworth’s ‘guide’ carried on West’s legacy by recommending a number of his ‘stations’²⁷ (stopping points for appraising the scene) and even quoting him (Wordsworth 1984).

²⁴ For example in 1790 Wordsworth praised ‘the maid of Buttermere’ in a prelude. This maid was Mary Robinson, the daughter of the landlord at the Buttermere Inn, her beauty grew in fame and visitors came to appraise her beauty in the same spirit as that of the landscape (Ousby, 1990).

²⁵ In particular early writings about peak cavern or the more commonly known ‘Deveils arse’ in the Peak District began to discuss the joys of a visit which evoked feelings of fear and wonder Ibid..

²⁶ For example In Thomas Gray’s ‘*Journal of the Lakes*’ published in 1769, two years before his death the vocabulary of ‘horrid beauty’ he had utilised on his alpine journey thirty years before was then applied to Lakeland scenery (Schama 1995).

²⁷ The correct vantage point for appreciating the picturesque beauty of the lakes was variously debated. For Gilpin, not every scene in the Lake District was ‘correctly picturesque’. For example, it was suggested that high vantage points (popular amongst walkers today) may serve to flatten the scenery. Thus elevation was not always desirable (Ousby 1990).

These 'stations' are still thought to influence the pattern that Lake District tourism follows today (Ousby 1990, 158), contributing to the way in which the Lake District has become an area of 'constructed visibility' (Bell and Lyall, 2000).

Picturesque modes of looking at landscape as an 'ordered pictorial whole' were also aided by the accompaniment of a Claude glass. The Claude glass (or Gray's Glass as a tribute to Thomas Gray who popularized it) enabled the visitor to see the landscape as if Claude Lorraine had painted it. The Glass was a convex mirror about four inches in diameter in which landscape scenes could be reflected. As Ousby (1990) explains:

The spectator stood with his back to the scene and viewed it in the glass, at one remove and already framed as if it were a picture. The scene itself was distorted and recomposed...soft colours were achieved by using different backing foils - the equivalent of camera filters – designed to reproduce the much admired mellow tones and golden light that bathes the landscape in Claude's paintings. (155)

Through the Claude Glass and tour guides such as Gilpin's, a culture of landscape had developed which promoted a set of fixed rules for viewing nature as picturesque landscape. For researchers of landscape of a historicist bent, these early verbal and pictorial influences are argued to have become almost inseparable from the direct experience of nature. For example, Nash (2005) echoes the conceptual framework of Cosgrove in order to argue that the poetry and writing of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries conveyed '...ideas of an ordered, distanced and linear vision *instead of* a sense of immersion in the landscape and its sounds, fragrances and sites.' (Nash 2005, 158, my italics). While Heffernan (1984) argues that

...by the end of the eighteenth century, the pervasive influence of the picturesque had made it difficult for any educated traveller even to see scenery without thinking of pictures, much less describe it without doing so. (15)

However, Heffernan and Nash do not acknowledge the fact that, the ways in which landscape representations script our actual bodily engagement with the landscape was an issue being debated even as the categories of the picturesque and the sublime were being constructed. Eighteenth century writing on the picturesque poked fun at the rule bound scripted visual landscape experience that tour guides such as Gilpin's promoted. For example, the impossibility and potential foolishness entailed in achieving picturesque principles is recognized in Plumptree's²⁸ popular play '*The Lakers: A Comic Opera in Three Acts*' where the unthinking picturesque traveller who simply conforms to a set of rules laid down in guidebooks such as Gilpin's is the subject of ridicule. This occurs through the character 'Miss Veronica' an incompetent walker who turns walking simply into an opportunity for picturesque posing. The rules of picturesque viewing became the subject of satire even as the term and its accompanying guidebooks were gaining popularity. Jane Austen is found to have poked fun at 'Gilpinesque' landscape viewing (Wallace 1993, 101) and other women writers of the period relay how the pictorial formula for viewing nature was difficult to achieve in practice (McMillan 2000).

Thus, early writing on the impossibility of achieving 'picturesque principles' draws attention to the fact that while guidebooks and treatises on aesthetic theory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attempted to prescribe particular modes of viewing landscape, they were not necessarily followed to the letter or even taken that seriously! In Wordsworth's later works he, too, attempted to distance himself from picturesque ideas (Miall 2000) and in book eleven of '*The Prelude*' expresses a concern for the tyranny of the eye referring to it as the most 'despotic' sense²⁹. This

²⁸ Plumptree was well placed to write this play having been a most enthusiastic participant in the uptake of walking for pleasure - making three walking tours of the Lakes between 1796 and 1799 (Wallace 1993). While in 1799 it is thought that he walked an exceptional 1,174 miles from Cambridge to the Scottish highlands and back again (Andrews, 1989)(Also see '*The Tour of Doctor Syntax*' by William Coombe which satirized the vogue for picturesque travel.)

²⁹ In which the eye was master of the heart,
When that which is in every stage of life
The most despotic of our senses gained
Such strength in me as often held my mind
In absolute dominion. (*Prelude* 11.171-75)
Wordsworth plans to thwart this tyranny of the eye by following Nature which
summons all the senses each...
To counteract the other and themselves,
And make them all, and the objects with which all
Are conversant, subservient in their turn
To the great ends of liberty and power. (*Prelude* 11.179-183)

anti-ocular thrust in Wordsworth's later poetry indicates a wider dissatisfaction amongst Romantic writers of the nineteenth century, that the vocabulary of the picturesque was an inadequate form of description for their multi-sensuous and peripatetic engagements with the material landscape (Jarvis 1997; McMillan 2000). For example, Coleridge had a habit of referring to viewpoints as 'resting places' in place of the customary picturesque term 'station' as a way of subverting picturesque norms and drawing attention to the fact that our justification for looking at the view may simply be attributed to our tired body! For Jarvis (1997) this habit is evidence of a 'freedom from picturesque conformity [which] stems from a physical immersion in the landscape that can arise only from walking through it' (131). Looking at landscape did not necessarily involve a pictorial gaze.

Writing and representations of landscape also addressed political and economic circumstances. For example, Price and Payne Knight's picturesque is thought to have directly addressed political and economic conditions and constructed a picturesque landscape to be lived in not just looked at (Daniels and Watkins 1994, 13). While Ballantyne (1994) argues that Knight's 'Landscape: a didactic poem' is as concerned with a libertarian form of politics at least as much as the layout of landscape, finding in Knight's poem 'nature worship', 'paganism', 'fiercely anti-christian views', 'political freedom' and 'sympathy for the revolutionaries in France'. Ballantyne's re-reading of Price's landscape begins to reveal the diversity of eighteenth century aesthetic theories of landscape and the potential for concepts of landscape to be about much more than the ordered, distanced, linear vision which Cosgrove (1984) was keen to emphasize in his work on landscape as visual ideology. Thus while Cosgrove (1985) points to landscape's '...conservatism in presenting an image of natural and social harmony,' (58) images of scenic landscape and broader concepts of the rural idyll have actually been mobilised for a variety of political ends and there was no single ideological mode of viewing or representing the landscapes of the Lakes and Peaks³⁰.

³⁰ For example, ideas of scenic landscape and the rural idyll were utilised in the anti-industrial arguments of Whig and Radical dissent of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. While by the late nineteenth century William Morris mobilized notions of the rural idyll in his socialist condemnation of industrial capitalism, yet Ruskin's nature writing and conservative philosophy fuelled anti-modern, anti-industrial sentiments (Bunce 1994; Daniels and Watkins 1994).

From the Sublime to the Stuplime: early theorizations of landscape encounter

Sublime: Of things in nature and art: Effecting the mind with a sense of overwhelming grandeur or irresistible power; calculated to inspire awe, deep reverence, or lofty emotion, by reason of its beauty, vastness, or grandeur (Oxford English Dictionary, 2005)

I have traced the tradition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of taking pleasure in viewing areas such as the Lakes and Peaks and the codification of these areas through a developing ‘cult of scenery’. In Geography, until recently, analysis of English landscape has tended to mimic Cosgrove’s notion of landscape as a ‘way of seeing’ and connected these visual aspects of the landscape concept to a notion of landscape as visual ideology (Nash 2005). However, writing on landscape, the picturesque and the sublime entailed more than just a codification of nature; in fact it entailed a satire of such scripted modes of visual engagement and the way in which the body intervenes in such scripts. Therefore, in the following section I concentrate on ideas of the sublime and show how theories of the sublime were not only about the codification of scenery via ‘Gilpinesque’ rules for viewing landscape. Rather, theories of the sublime also addressed complex issues regarding the nature of subjectivity; where the sublime affect – the loss of a self-conscious rational subject – was crucial to the philosophy of the human subject which sublime theorists developed.

There is no single representation of sublime experience (Gilroy 2000) and the topic of the sublime is to be found in works of poetry, writing, art, gardening and music of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The qualities of the sublime experience include the overwhelming, the distant, the terrifying and the indistinct and these were to be found in both natural and man made forms (Ashfield and De Bolla 1996). In painting distinctions can be made between ‘apocalyptic’, a quieter ‘contemplative sublime’ and naturalistic forms of sublime experience (Casey 2002, 73). De Bolla, in analyzing early texts on sublime experience, finds it as consistently defined as that which cannot be incorporated into the current discursive network (De Bolla 1989). Thus the sublime raises the possibility that an individual’s experience of the material world is not necessarily possible to express through language, that experience falls

outside that which is possible to represent. Experience of landscape is ‘open to the play of the world’(Deleuze and Guttari 2004). Thus what is at stake in sublime experience is the power of human agency.

It is the conservative political theorist Edmund Burke (1729-1797) who is usually credited with developing sublime theory and applying it to a range of natural forms. Burke’s text entitled ‘*A philosophical enquiry into the origins of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful*’ (1757) interwove moral, aesthetic and economic judgments into an almost scientific scrutiny of taste and attempted to forge a set of distinctions between the categories of the sublime and the beautiful. By ‘coding’ the sublime Burke is thought to have provided a range of words and ideas upon which intellectual society could draw in order to describe mountains, scenery, waterfalls and other fearsome objects (Macfarlane 2003, 76). However, Burke’s sublime was not just about pleasures of the eye and their articulation, it was a ‘corporeal aesthetic’ which included a repertoire of sensual experiences such as terror, solitude, difficulty, uncertainty, tragedy, obscurity and privation (MacDonald 2001, 157). The key aspect of these sublime sensations was terror and in the opening section entitled ‘Of the Sublime’ in Part I, section 6 of his enquiry, Burke identifies this ‘terrible’ aspect of the sublime:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling.

(Burke 1757, 36)

Aspects of a scene that Burke thought that the sublime experience of terror resided in included height, depth and darkness (Casey 2002, 40). In Part II of the enquiry he describes the affect of ‘astonishment’ which encounters with these objects engendered:

...astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely

filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it.

(Burke 1757, 79-80)

The sublime's capacity to dislocate a rational observer was for Burke its great power. Burke, like Hume, thought that order in society was achieved and maintained through imitative behaviour; a cycle of knowledge and manners learnt through mutual conformity and repetition. However, he also recognized that within this cycle was the potential for stagnation, some alternative force was required. For Burke this force existed in the overwhelming experience of the sublime (Eagleton 1990, 53). What is interesting to note here is that Burke identifies a need to theorize that which falls outside of discourse. In this way his desire to theorize sublime affect is comparable to the non-representational concern with bodily encounter and that which falls outside of discourse (Chapter 2). However, unfortunately Burke eroticizes the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, regarding beauty as the more natural property of women in contrast to the masculine rigours of the sublime³¹ and in his endeavour to produce a 'logic of taste' and oppose the categories of the sublime and the beautiful, his work collapsed into a paradoxical search in the face of the infinite possibilities of the human subject (Phillips 1990).

Theories of the sublime are of significance to this thesis for they indicate an early awareness that people's experiences of landscape may tend to exceed our powers of verbal description and an early attempt to address that difficulty. However this situation becomes paradoxical for the sublime concern with excess produced a set of attempts to explain the effect of the sublime through language. Thus discourse on the sublime became an 'analytic of the sublime'. For De Bolla this is the seduction that the sublime constantly creates and then must confront – the inaccessible, inarticulable nature of experience and then a paradoxical attempt to access this

³¹ For Burke, the sublime experience of landscape requires a masculine subject position of 'giving up control' in order to 'surrender' to the experience of the 'true sublime'. Labbe (1998) argues that two 'predominantly masculine traits' required to experience the sublime were '...the powerful all seeing, generalizing eye' and 'a proprietary relationship to the landscape'. However, while Burke's writing is clearly located within a phenomenology of male desire, not everyone drew on this language of aesthetics in the same way. Women did not represent landscape in consistently different ways than men (Mills 2000). However, some women writers are thought to have revised Burke's model of the sublime and imbued their landscape descriptions with more detail and an 'ethic of care' (Gilroy 2000).

through language (De Bolla 1989). De Bolla notes how this means that ultimately the sublime experience became a 'discursive affect', which produces the feelings it sets out to define. This discursive affect required a self conscious and desiring social subject. This meant that while the sublime set out to describe a particular form of excessive encounter, ultimately it ended up creating it and requiring a particular reflexive form of subjectivity for its identification.

Like writing on the sublime, non-representational research shares a concern with the excessive nature of the subject and the way in which human experience exceeds its verbal description (Chapter 2). Like the sublime, the translation of human experience into textual description and the losses which occur in this process is a problem that writing and research in the wake of non-representational theory confronts (Harrison 2006). What we may learn from De Bolla's (1989) account of the problems encountered by theorists of the sublime is that clearly there is no perfect communicative state. This means that the discursive and material landscape as it is experienced by people with blindness will never quite reach these pages, for while we may be able to hint at the excessive nature of the subject we inevitably cannot verbalise the inarticulable and the excessive!

We must therefore confront certain circularity in our attempts to represent experience, for in writing about the experiences of landscape we are inevitably drawn back into a limited logo-centric system which prioritizes text, visuality and speech. While we are not trapped in a singular discourse – we can open up particular spaces of writing and talk (a topic of Chapter 5) – there will always be gaps, fissures and limits to our accounts. Language can therefore be understood to have a sort of deadening effect on the world as it is experienced. These deadening and circular effects of our attempts to explain human experience through language can ultimately result in a sort of boredom; this boredom is what contemporary aesthetic theorist Ngai (2005) refers to as the 'Stuplime'. In comparing stuplimity to the sublime Ngai writes how stuplimity induces '...a series of fatigues or minor exhaustions, rather than a single, major blow to the imagination' (272). It is an affect which is created and illustrated in the work of writers such as Samuel Beckett (Beckett 1994). We cannot fully resolve this 'stuplime' affect (the mistake of Burke), that is why it can ultimately be quite boring! However we can seek to acknowledge its presence. It

demands a certain humility on the part of the writer and it requires us to recognize the fact that there is no fixed ground upon which we can always hang meaning (Cf. Varela 1993). We can respond to stuplime affect by creating more of it and developing spaces of writing which allow for an acknowledgement of writing's limits (Chapters 5-9). We can also respond to stuplime affect by thinking through the implications that this affect has for our understandings of the embodied subject (Chapter 2) and moral responsibility (Chapter 10).

A spreading cult of treating countryside space as landscape scenery

In this final section I wish to return to the developing cult of landscape as scenery mentioned earlier in the chapter, and think through the ways in which in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the idea of seeing landscape scenery spread, got taken up and transformed by the growing urban industrial middle and working classes. This is done in order to illustrate the more contemporary contextual background against which walkers with blindness now visit the Lakes and Peaks.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries population and occupational shifts meant that the role that the countryside played in the lives and imaginations of a growing urban industrial middle and working class in Britain was changing. While in 1700 four out of five lived in rural areas, by 1830 growing industrialization meant that one in two lived in towns (Harrison 1991). This change in location and occupations and the smog, disease, poor sanitation and housing conditions in industrial cities meant that people began to write of the virtues of the countryside placing the 'rural idyll' (Cloke and Little 1997) firmly in the imagination of urban dwellers. A generation of Romantic writers, poets and artists started to adopt, adapt and spread scenic concepts of landscape and the general public began to view rural landscapes through a detached and idealised mode of perception; a way of seeing landscape thought to be enabled through their city location (Williams 1973, 298). Advances in printing also fuelled this way of seeing landscape through increasing the circulation of landscape imagery (Bunce 1994; Burchandt 2002).

Advances in road and rail transport in the nineteenth century (Bunce 1994; Burchandt 2002) meant that increasingly the middle and working classes were able

to escape the cities for weekend and summer holiday outings. By the 1830s there were many hotels and inns throughout the Lake District and Peak District regions (Bell and Lyall 2002) and by 1847 the Kendal to Windermere branch line, for weekend excursionists from the manufacturing towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire had been completed and this dramatically increased the number of visitors to the Lakes. Early tourists were keen to visit the most picturesque areas and it is suggested that a desire to 'collect views' amongst these early tourists was partly attributable to earlier traditions of hunting where 'the instinct to gather, if not to hunt, remained in place, whether the walker collected botanical specimens or merely picturesque views' (Landry 2001, 22). However, the newly prosperous industrial working class visitors also became a threat to the aesthetic sensibilities of earlier visitors, country land-owners and local authorities (Harrison 1991). This was a 'problem' expressed by Wordsworth in his letters which had publicly opposed the Kendal to Windermere Railway (Ousby 1990, 191). Divisions occurred between those who could participate in 'a claim on England as national aesthetic property' and those rural residents who were the subject but never the viewer of such scenes (Helsing 1994).

By the twentieth century images of rural England had been used as citizenship propaganda and mobilized for a variety of political ends (Agnew 1998; Matless 1998). Most famously perhaps, images of scenic landscape became part of an image of Britain for which loyal citizens should fight; used to boost civilian morale and the war effort in posters for both the First and Second World Wars (Matless 1998; Blackburn 2006) (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Research by Brace (2003) also shows how in the 1930s and 40s countryside writing, dust jacket art, maps and books further reinforced such connections between scenic landscape and a sense of Englishness (Brace 2003).



Figure 1.1 First World War poster, Artist Unknown, Imperial war museum

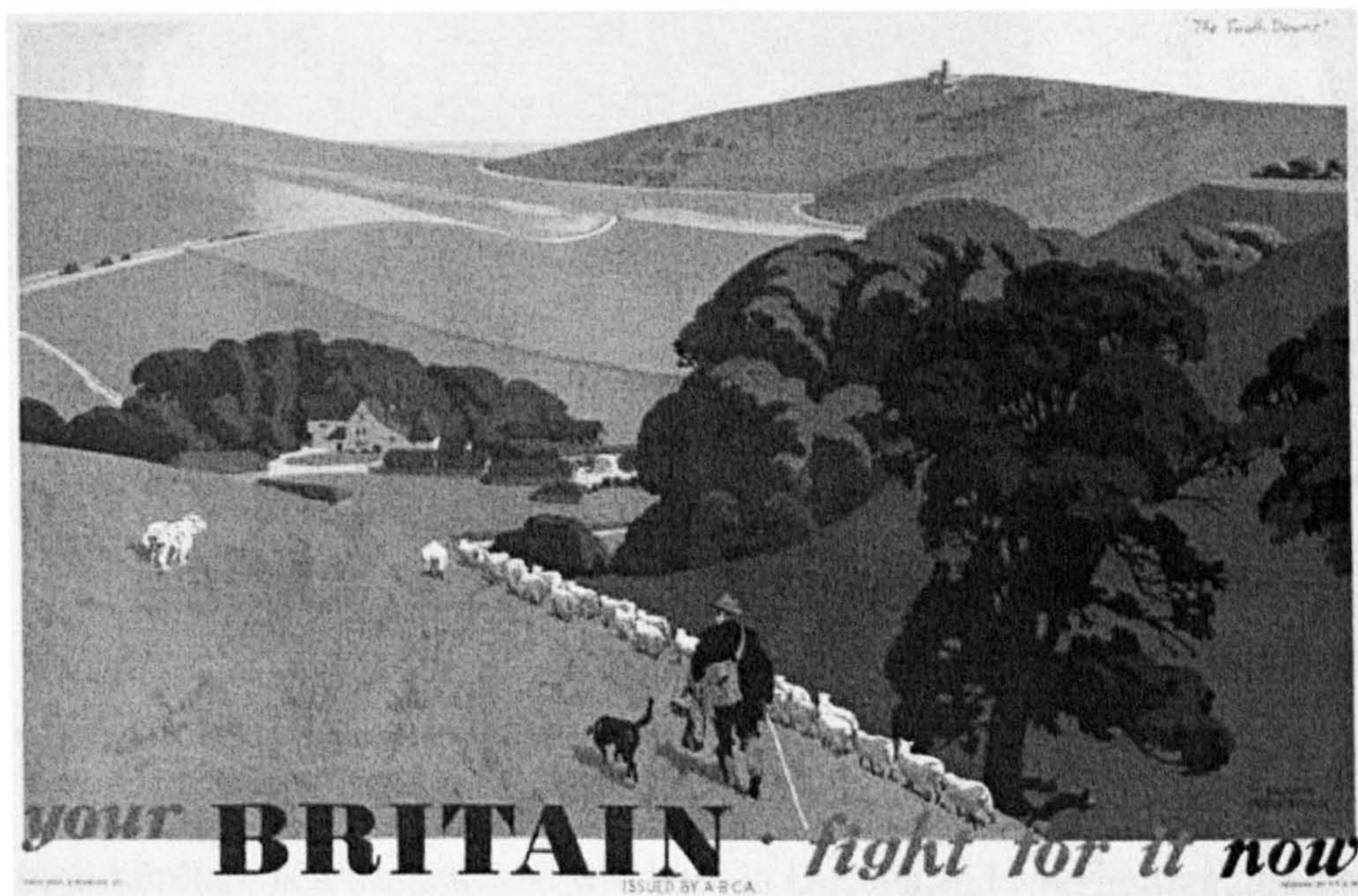


Figure 1.2 Second World War poster, Frank Newbould, 1942, Army Bureau of Current Affairs

These connections between rural landscape and Englishness are thought to fuel exclusionary and conservative notions of English national identity (Cloe and Little

1997) and are key to the processes of inclusion, exclusion and ambivalence experienced by contemporary ethnic minority visitors to the English countryside (Kinsman 1995; Agyeman and Spooner 1997; Slee et al. 2001; Tolia-Kelly 2004). The processes of inclusion and exclusion felt by ethnic minorities, disabled and other minority visitors to the English countryside are also issues of contemporary policy relevance which have begun to be addressed in recent research conducted for the Countryside Agency Diversity Review (Countryside Agency 2005). Disabled people have, until recently, been a relatively under-researched user group in this process comparison to ethnic minorities (Slee et al. 2001). This research develops this area by exploring walkers with blindness' experiences of the English countryside. However, as I stated in the introduction to this thesis, I am not concerned with how to inform or attract walkers with blindness to the countryside, but rather I place an emphasis on what can be learnt about body-landscape encounters from these people.



...Searching for sea-shells; waves lap my wellington boots, carrying
lost souls of brothers & sisters released over the ship side...

Figure 1.3 Ingrid Pollard, Pastoral Interludes, 1987

Ingrid Pollard is a woman who was born in Guyana and who immigrated to England in the 1950s while still a baby; in her series 'Pastoral Interludes (1987) (Figure 1.3) she photographs herself in romantic poses in the English landscape. This is a deliberate visual strategy which reveals the sense of incongruity and exclusion she felt in these places, highlighting an ongoing association between rural landscape and

whiteness. I echo this visual strategy in the thesis through the use of photographs of walkers with blindness (throughout) and through the use of blind and visually impaired artists paintings of landscape (Chapter 7). This is done in order to highlight and confront a tendency to associate rural landscape with clarity of vision and the independent able body, associations which are explored in Matless's work on *Landscape and Englishness* (Matless 1992; Matless 1995; Matless 1998) and which I hope to have made evident in this chapter (the ethics of this photography are discussed in Chapter 5). By using these visual strategies the research is also intended to gather the attention and reflections of people who continue to load the landscape concept with normative realist visual values.

Conclusions

Landscape has long been connected with ideas of visual apprehension which may seem to render walkers with blindness a paradoxical presence in the landscapes of the Lakes and Peaks. However concepts of landscape are not only about the individual pleasure of the eye. Landscape can also be understood as a form of collective culture, or 'visual ideology' which extends beyond the individual and contributes to powerful processes of inclusion and exclusion potentially relevant to walkers with blindness. Furthermore, since the eighteenth century, landscape has been embroiled in an aesthetic/ideological debate over the nature of landscape encounter, the way in which such encounters influence our thoughts and representations and the limits of representing such encounters. This thesis contributes to this debate over landscape, representation and the body. In this chapter I argue that in any narration of blind encounters with landscape, the history of landscape as a form of visual apprehension cannot be ignored, however, landscape cannot be reduced to this history, for when we think through bodily encounters with landscape we must also think of how such encounters might also fall outside of the confines of representation and the visual. It is this research challenge which I turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 – Bodies and landscapes in the wake of Non-representational theory

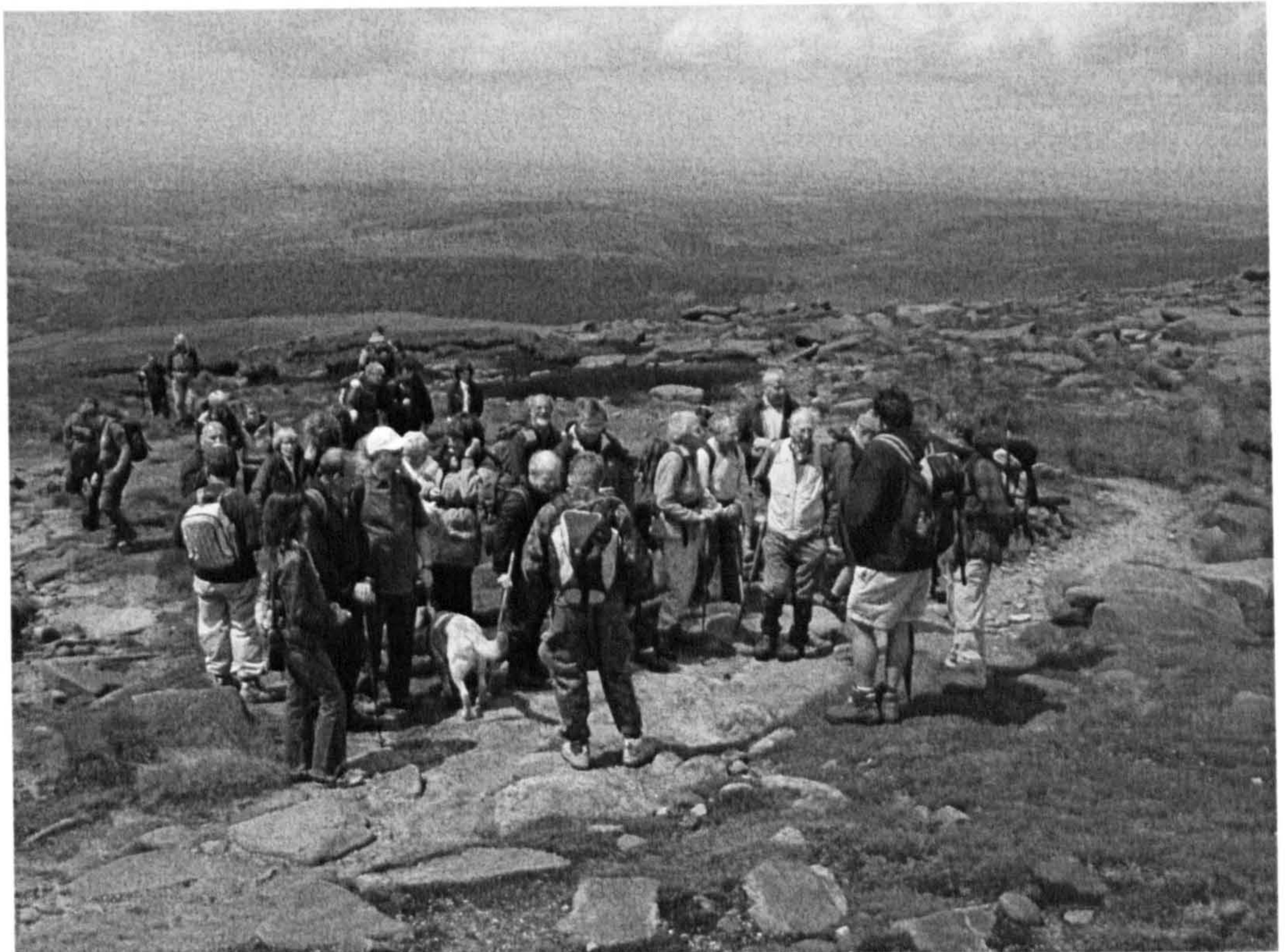


Photo 2.1 Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group, August 2004, Kinder Scout

Synopsis

In this chapter I outline my understanding of some of the key elements of non-representational theory (NRT) and attend to the significance of NRT for contemporary understandings of bodies and landscapes. Key themes which I take from NRT and develop in subsequent chapters include; a processual approach to concepts of landscape and embodiment, a concern with what can and cannot be put into words (particularly when speaking across bodily differences) and a concern with what neuroscience can add to our accounts of the embodied subject. In the wake of NRT recent writing in Geography draws attention to how landscape maybe thought of as a process rather than representation, emergent through a mix of embodied and discursive relations. Such 'non-representational' approaches to landscape are considered important because they offer a departure point from previous attempts to theorise landscape in cultural Geography, inspired by Cosgrove's 'way of seeing' approach and they transcend structure-agency dualisms persistent in such accounts of landscape as a form of representation, helping to reconcile phenomenological insights into the individual sensing body with insights into the structuring and ideological capacities of culture. However, in this chapter I also warn that the excesses of NRT should be avoided and that, in fact, recent writing on landscape in the wake of NRT is in danger of perpetuating an 'ablist'³² sense of landscape through continuing to place an emphasis on the normative body in order to 'ground' understanding.

Introduction

Non-representational theory (NRT), a term coined by Thrift (1996), calls for social scientists to re-evaluate their supposedly heavy emphasis on representation and interpretation and move '...away from a view of the world based on contemplative models of thought and action toward theories of practice which amplify the potential flow of events'(Thrift 2000, 556). While non-representational thought is not new an increasing number of researchers in geography paying attention to the term which is used by Thrift and attached to a body of philosophical and phenomenological work

³² 'ablism' refers to ideas and practices which assume able-bodiedness (Parr 1999)

which places an emphasis on how space and time emerge through embodied practice and which pay attention to the emotional, intuitive, the fleeting and the habitual as well as the represented. The array of theoretical literature which non-representational approaches build upon is outlined by Thrift in a timeline (Figure 2.1). It includes the post structural work of writers such as Wittgenstein, Foucault, Deleuze and Haraway; the actor network theories of Latour, Law and Serres and a range of writing on practice from the likes of Benjamin, De Certeau, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Thrift corrals these authors into a series of articles which outline and expand upon an agenda for non-representational ways of thinking and research (Thrift 1996; Thrift 1997; Thrift 1999; Thrift 2000a; Thrift 2003). This is an agenda which has subsequently been elaborated and reworked by a range of authors in the discipline of geography (see for example Harrison 2000; Pratt 2000; Dewsbury, Harrison et al. 2002; Rose 2002; Dewsbury 2003; Hitchings 2003; Tolia-Kelly 2006). However NRT has received a variable reception in geography, variously critiqued for risking a de-politicized, exclusive agenda (Thien 2005) and for embracing novelty for its own sake (Castree and Macmillan 2004), critiques I will come to address and add to later in this chapter.

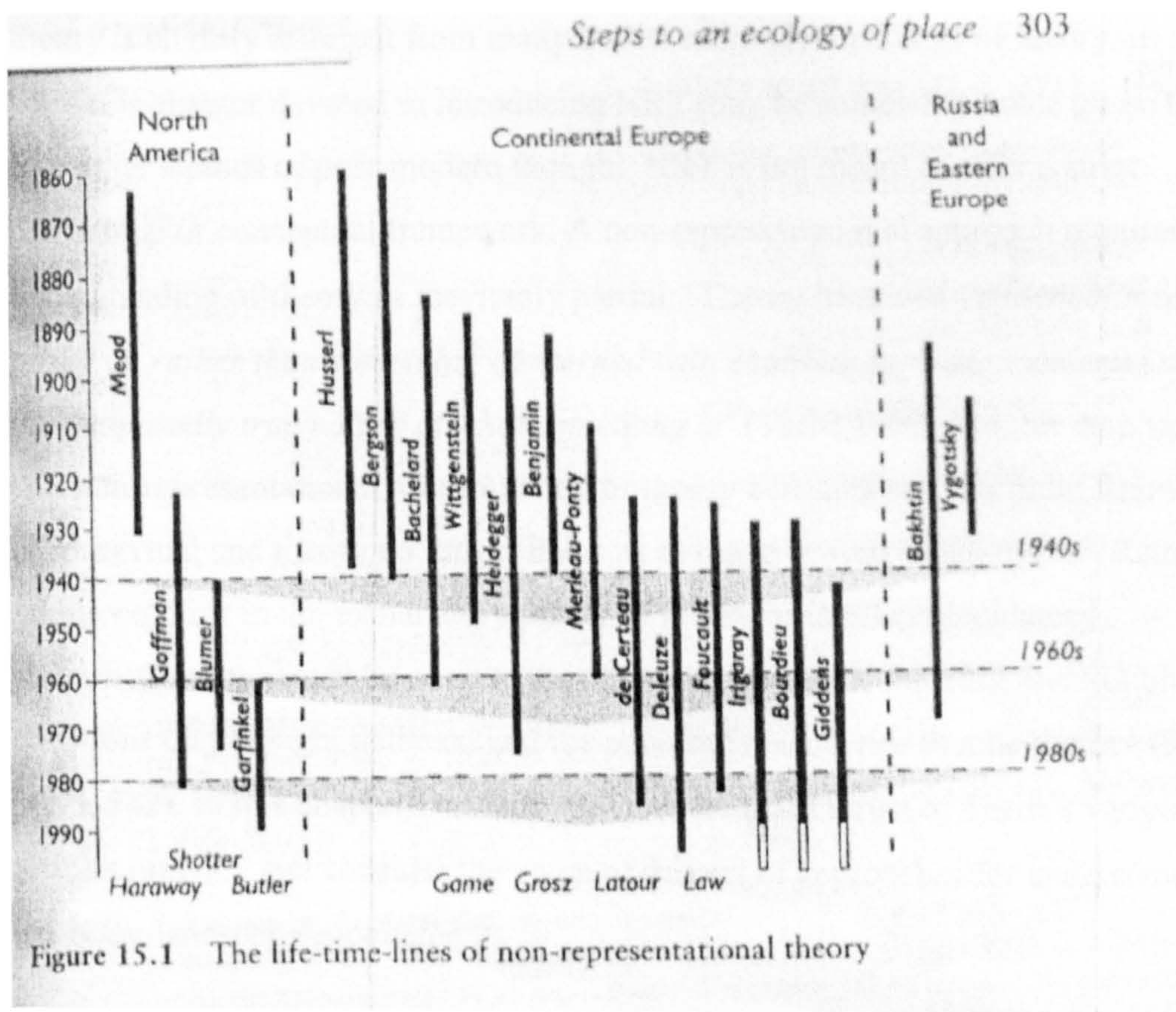


Figure 2.1 Thrift's (1999) 'life-time-lines' of non-representational theory

Considerable research debate is currently centred on the term NRT in geography, and NRT places questions of embodiment and representation at the centre of its agenda. This meant that I was initially drawn to the term and associated literature to help me think through some of the theoretical and conceptual challenges of researching blind experiences of landscape. I was also interested in researching blind experiences of landscape in order to contribute to this contemporary non-representational theoretical interest evident in the discipline. Thus, the theoretical approach and the subject of the research seemed to have emerged in tandem rather than one inevitably flowing from the other. Ideas which may be broadly classified under the heading NRT became significant to this thesis for they challenged common place notions of a bounded body or a fixed mappable landscape to which meaning and certainty can be attached. The non-representational emphasis on the relational, sensuous, animating, mobile and fleeting aspects of body-landscape was something which seemed potentially very relevant to blind walkers' experiences of landscape.

From the outset it is important to understand that a non-representational approach to theory is slightly different from many traditional understandings of theory. In fact, to have this chapter devoted to introducing NRT may be somewhat ironic given that, like other strands of post-modern thought, NRT is not meant to offer a strict theoretical or conceptual framework. A non-representational approach requires an understanding of theory as inevitably partial. 'Theory becomes a *practical means of going on rather than something concerned with enabling us to see, contemplatively, the supposedly true nature of what something is*' (Thrift 1999, 394, his emphasis). In this non-representational reformulation of theory concepts are indefinite, knowledge is contextual and theory no longer helps us to move toward grand truths. 'Rather than taking comfort in the explanatory power of theory or in other elucidatory constructions, we must be open to the disruptive power of thinking, the troubling questions that thought delivers, and the potential discoveries that lie therein.' (Rose 2006, 542). In this chapter I critically review the main thrust of Thrift's various articles on NRT and consider the value of this set of approaches for understanding the body-landscape encounter.

Key elements of non-representational theory

One of the key elements of NRT has been a critique of the emphasis social scientists have put in representation (texts, discourses, pictures, films etc.) and conscious choice at the expense of the more habitual, performative and fleeting aspects of social life (Thrift 1997). While NRT is clearly not the only form of theory which you might refer to as non-representational (cf. Smith 2003), NRT has had a very significant impact on the direction of research and debate in Geography (see Lorrimer 2005 for an overview of these impacts). In the wake of NRT approaches, which may be broadly referred to as non-representational (focusing as they do on issues of practice, embodiment and the non-discursive) have been utilised to interpret topics as diverse as race (Saldanha 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2006), music (Smith 2000), dance therapy (McCormack 2002), walking (Wylie 2002) gardening (Hitchings 2003) and most significantly for this research concepts of landscape (Rose 2002; Wylie 2002; Wylie 2003; Wylie 2005; Rose 2006; Rose and Wylie 2006). Despite this wave of interest in NRT there has been only limited uptake of NRT amongst researchers of disability in geography and elsewhere³³. This may well be due to the rather inaccessible language that many writers on this topic adopt and also because NRT potentially undermines disability politics founded on the idea of a common experience of oppression or an individual fight for rights (a topic I will address later in this chapter).

Non-representational approaches draw attention to practice, the habitual and the non-discursive. The term non-representational does not mean it is anti-representation nor does it deny that representation is significant. Rather, echoing insights from actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour 1999) representation is just one variable element of the hybrid assemblages of technologies, objects and bodies which bring worlds into being. NRT can be somewhat confusing given the unfortunate teleology of the prefix 'non'. In fact, Lorrimer (2005) suggests that 'more-than representational' would have been a better choice of term, indicating how in NRT, 'The focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective

³³ Although for an exception see Hetherington's work on visually impaired access to museums (Hetherington 2000; 2002; 2003).

intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions' (Lorrimer 2005, 84).

Justification for NRT's focus on practice stems in part from recent neurobiological research that draws attention to the half-second delay between the brain initiating an action and conscious sensation. This half-second delay means that many of our actions are beyond the immediate conscious control. Instead intuitions, habits and reflexes bring about much of what constitutes social life (cf. Varela 1999; Connely 2002). Here consciousness (in terms of an individual's continual conscious control of all their thought and actions) is a 'user illusion' (Norretranders 1999). This means that models of the self as a conscious, rational actor must be de-centered in favor of an understanding of perception as emerging through the body and the unfolding of 'action-in-context' (Varela 1992; Damasio 1999; Varela 1999). Intuitions, habits and dispositions, alongside our interactions with objects and other bodies contribute toward our actions and thoughts. These relational engagements become elements of the world worth attending to in social scientific research. This is not an environmental determinist argument. Rather, following the insights from neuroscience regarding the 'unfolding-of action in context' embodiment, perceptions and emotions are understood as relational emerging from environmental contexts, social settings and culturally ingrained intuitions (Thrift 2004, 60).

In order to elucidate these non-representational modes of being in the world, researchers have taken inspiration from a whole raft of work based around metaphors of performance (Dewsbury, Harrison et al. 2002; Dewsbury and Naylor 2002; Crouch 2003; Latham 2003; Latham and Conradson 2003; Law and Urry 2004) (see Nash 2000 for an excellent review of this work on performance). Here, individual rational agency is replaced by an understanding of a performative 'body-subject'³⁴ (Thrift 1997) and researcher endeavors have been reconceptualized as performative accomplishments (Pratt 2000; Latham 2003) (see also Chapter 5). This emphasis on practice and performance requires researchers to formulate quite particular understandings of the body and landscape. It is these understandings to which I will now turn.

³⁴ A term Thrift borrows from Seamon and his earlier phenomenologically inspired work on 'place-ballets' (Seamon, 1980)

Non-representational approaches to the body and implications for theorizing disability

NRT demands a shift away from socially constructed or individualized medical models of the body (including the disabled body) toward a more complex understanding of the body as constantly in process. Here the body is understood to be the reserve of biological impulses and cultural-neurological habits and is emergent through its ‘interweavings’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004)³⁵ with the world. As researchers this requires us to make a fundamental shift in how we think through and ask questions about bodies. We cannot simply ask; what is a body? or what are the senses? Rather, focus falls on what a body can do and on the process of embodiment. That is *how the body takes shape through its interactions with the world and in conjunction with other objects and bodies*. Thinking about the body in action in this way can be traced to the work of Spinoza. It is a perspective which also shares parallels with the work of Naess whose philosophy emphasises the interconnection of all things (Naess, 1989).

In NRT the body is understood to be always on the move and ‘...when a body is in motion, it does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition: its own variation’ (Massumi 2002, 5). As a result, the body does not necessarily help us to ground or fix our ideas. Rather, to think about the body in movement means ‘...accepting the paradox that there is an incorporeal dimension *of the body*. Of it, but not it. Real, material but incorporeal’ (Latham and McCormack 2004, 709). In a sense this means that there is a groundlessness to the body and to meaning (cf. Varela 1993). This approach to the body also takes its inspiration from an array of phenomenological and post-structural theoretical approaches from Heidegger to

³⁵ This understanding of the body resonates with actor-network approaches. However non-representational approaches may diverge somewhat from actor network theory: Firstly, in their emphasis on the less mechanical ‘haunting’ qualities of embodied experience which exist at the edge of semantic availability (Dewsbury 2003); secondly in an emphasis on what relations do rather than just points of connection (Ingold 2006) and thirdly, in an emphasis on the significance of topography as well as topology. Where Thrift writes: ‘Latour and other actor network theorists often fail to see the importance of place: their vision of a radically symmetrical world of networks, consisting of different aspects like humans, animals and things, and mobiles like writing, print, paper and money constantly combining and recombining is an important corrective to simple humanisms and to simple notions of connectedness, but it also means that actor network theory cannot speak of certain things. In particular, Latour and other actor-network theorists often fail to see the importance of place because they are reluctant to ascribe different competences to different aspects of a network or to understand the role of common ground in how networks echo back and forth, often unwittingly.’ (Thrift 1999)

Deleuze; the precise lineage and implications of which have been variously debated in the geographical literature (Harrison 2000; Dewsbury 2003; Wylie 2005; Harrison 2006). It demands an open-ended approach to human embodied experience and an appreciation of how our sense of embodiment comes about through processes of interconnection (Varela et al. 1993; Naess 1989). This idea of interconnection and groundlessness is a perspective which is also endorsed by Buddhist philosophies of human experience (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999).

In this non-representational approach to the body, environmental perception is not the passive cognition of the world followed by inference but rather, ‘...perception becomes a modulating trajectory which describes how the world is and simultaneously prescribes a space of adaptive responses’ while ‘the environment is, if you like, an extension of the mind – and, significantly, vice versa.’ (Dewsbury and Thrift 2000a, 415). It is an *immersed and enactive* understanding of perception where the term ‘enactive’ can be used to ‘...emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs’ (Varela et al. 1993, 9).

Interestingly, aspects of this immersed understanding of perception is a perspective that has long been endorsed by philosophical reflection and research on the experiences of those people born blind (Polanyi 1958; Merleau-ponty 1962; Diderot 1999)³⁶. However, a considerable proportion of geographic research with blind and visually impaired people has tended to ignore these phenomenological insights. Instead working with the assumption that those with blindness possess and work from ‘cognitive maps’ or ‘inner pictures’ which are used to store and retrieve information much like a computer and from which action, navigation and thought can proceed (Kitchin et al. 1997; Jacobson 1998; Blades et al. 1999)³⁷. In light of

³⁶ This use of the blind subject and individual blind testimony to endorse an approach to perception as immersion is an issue elaborated on in chapter 4 where it is found that blindness shuttles between registers; simultaneously an embodied experience, linguistic category and cultural role constituted by those who write of, speak of or act out the condition (see also Scott 1969)

³⁷ For example, it has been argued that: ‘... cognitive mapping research allows an insight into the ‘mental landscapes’ of people with blindness or visual impairments and, as such, has the potential to shed light upon what spatial and environmental information they acquire, how it is learnt and, how it is processed and stored’ (Kitchin et al 1997, 226).

NRT and earlier phenomenological insights into the embodied nature of perception (Polanyi 1958; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Heidegger 1971) this approach to understanding spatial perception as based on inner pictures seems somewhat limited and in need of revision.

The experiences of those people with blindness provide a powerful critique of purely cognitivist approaches to understanding perception and lend valuable support to an understanding of perception as intuitive and embodied, rather than necessarily based solely on 'inner pictures' (Cook 1992; Allen 2004). A body of research on blindness in Geography including, Hill's (1985) 'phenomenology of sightlessness', Cook's (1992) Masters thesis 'Drowning in See-World?', Hetherington's (2003) work on visually impaired access to museums and Allen's (2004) work on the life-worlds of visually impaired children all draw attention to the intuitive and embodied nature of non-visual perception and the way in which perception occurs in conjunction with the world. For example, Allen (2004) draws directly upon Merleau-Ponty (1962) to critique cognitive mapping literature for prioritizing the mind over the body and argues instead that blind children develop a '...corporeal schema of 'body techniques' [that] facilitate an intuitive use of the home and urban environment' (734). While Hetherington (2003) writes that 'humans do not act in an object world but are constituted as perceiving beings at the interface between subject and object' (1938). My own research can be understood as extending this attention that geographers have given to issues of blindness and perception. However, my research deviates from these approaches through a novel empirical focus on walking experiences in the countryside and a non-representational theoretical focus which goes beyond the over individualising accounts inspired by Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology.

Previous research on blindness inspired by phenomenology and NRT draws attention to the distributed, enactive and context dependent nature of a person's perception. These understandings raise theoretical-empirical challenges for many researchers of disability. They require researchers to confront traditional individualized, medical or social constructivist approaches to the body and perception. Instead the body needs to be understood as a sort of hybrid – that is to say formed in conjunction with other bodies, technologies and objects (Whatmore 1999; 2002). This hybrid body is not a

static fixed or delimitable entity (cf. Haraway's 1991, 'cyborgs'). Rather, this hybrid body is constantly in formation, coming into existence through its relations to other objects and bodies. How the body comes about in this way depends on specific body-object encounters and how the body is put to use (see also Grosz 1995; Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Latour 2004).

If we think about the body in this way – as an unstable hybrid that is constantly in formation, 'becoming' rather than simply being or persisting in some fixed way, then disability cannot be understood to be a fixed category. Rather, thinking about disability requires us to think about the body in movement defined through on-going socio-material encounters. It also requires disability researchers to think through issues of embodied practice as well as attend to personal testimony of those people with disabilities.

Such an emphasis on the habitual, hybrid and context dependent nature of human embodiment and perceptual experience undermines the value that some researchers have placed on the personal testimony of individual people's embodied experiences of disability. Priority has instead been given to neurobiological insights into the human body and placing an emphasis on practice over what is said. This erosion of personal testimony exists in somewhat of a state of tension with a disability politics founded on a common sense of identity and oppression (Swain, Finkelstein et al. 1992) and constructed in order to give 'voice' to those people who have previously been oppressed. This reflects concerns which have been raised about encounters between post modern theory and disability in general that '....disabled activists may increasingly be left behind as disability is opened up to its own complexity' (Corker and Shakespear 2002, 14). This tension between NRT and a disability politics concerned with giving voice is a tension which important to acknowledge but cannot necessarily be resolved. A politics of disability founded in the immediate pragmatic concerns of the day may not always provide the most appropriate model for academics attempting to theorise embodied experience. However it is also important to note that non-representational interpretations of disability share some parallels with disability theory based on the 'social model' (Oliver 1983) of disability. For while in medicine disability is understood to be a deficit defined against a normative body; in the social model it is disabling environments that bring about disability; the result of

an 'ablist' society's material, structural or social barriers (Swain et al. 1992; Oliver 1995; Barnes 1996).

In the social model of disability emphasis is placed on the way in which society and environments constitute those who are thought of as disabled (Barnes 1996), however from this point on, non-representational approaches to the disabled body deviate. In NRT (and some new wave disability theory) attention is drawn to the fact that the body exists at the juncture between the natural and the cultural, it cannot be wholly either (Grosz 1995; Price and Shildrich 2002). However followers of the social model of disability tend to draw attention to socially constructed barriers that disabled people face, assuming that disability is a common oppressive experience and place an emphasis on independence and autonomy (Swain et al. 1992). Research which follows the social model is often participatory and aims to directly benefit participants through revealing and addressing the disabling barriers that individuals face in conducting their day-to-day lives³⁸. Following a social model of disability would have left my own research orientated toward addressing the physical and attitudinal barriers that disabled people face in accessing the countryside. This is something which has occurred through government policy. For example since the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1995) and Government guidelines on Rural Delivery (2000) research on disability and the countryside has proceeded along these lines making a commitment to

...carry out a full diversity review of how we can encourage more people with disabilities, more people from ethnic minorities, more people from the inner cities, and more young people to visit the countryside and participate in country activities.

(Rural white paper 2000,138)

The DDA has resulted in the commissioning of research which is aimed at addressing physical and attitudinal barriers that disabled and other minority groups face in accessing the countryside (see Countryside Agency 2005 for research in this vein). However, in the wake of NRT, it is clear that this is not the only way in which

³⁸ Examples of attempts to identify and address these barriers can be found in the work of Butler, R. and Bowlby (1997) and Kitchen et al. (1997).

disability research should proceed. While I accept that physical barriers to accessing the countryside should be minimized and applaud the practical steps in the wake of the DDA that have been made toward this goal³⁹, this is not the only way of doing research on disability and the countryside.

There are dangers in only doing disability research orientated around the social model, for the ‘...emphasis on disablement as a common oppressive experience may itself be seen as oppressive’ (Priestley 1995, 165). The social model may also mean we simply demand a victim status of such vulnerable groups to suit our narratives (cf. Pratt 2000) and ‘...end up creating totalizing meta-historical narratives that exclude important dimensions of disabled people’s lives and of their knowledge’ (Corker and Shakespear 2002, 15). Therefore, following the insights of NRT and some ‘new wave’ disability theorists, my research approaches disability through a focus on encounter, interconnection and difference rather than barriers to access or the liberal humanist pursuit of individual rights and interests. This is a research approach which recognizes that those with disabled bodies are legitimate subjects of research that does not necessarily foreground their disablement as something which must be ‘overcome’. Instead, this research approach explores how disability can be understood not only as a limitation or closing in of the horizons of possibility but also an opening out of horizons of human experience. Focus falls on *what a body can do* rather than its limitations and on the *various capacities of bodies to affect and be affected*. For it is an argument of this thesis that disability can help to both inform theorizations of embodied experience and also force us to confront the potentially irreducible differences of human experience. As Price and Shildrich argue:

Clearly the advances made by disability activists in terms of specifically targeted benefits of equal rights to employment, access, housing and so on are very valuable, but what they do not address is the more fundamental disavowal of difference that characterizes modernist society....The adoption of pragmatics alone, as though it closes the question of ethics, speaks to a denial rather than a radical recognition of difference. (73)

³⁹ However I also remain wary of the way in which such government inspired initiatives appear to rest on the dangerous assumption that to be a citizen one *should* take up these countryside recreation opportunities (see Tolia-Kelly 2006).

Thus, in this thesis *disability is conceptualised as being defined and redefined through ongoing social and material encounters*. This requires us to recognize firstly, that *the concept of disability only gains meaning in context* (in fact it is a concept that maybe extended to all human subjects for we may all be considered disabled (Davis 2002, 30). Secondly, it forces us to recognize that *there is an inevitable inter-dependence of all bodies*⁴⁰ (Grosz 1995; Price and Shildrich 2002; Thomas 2002) and disability helps us move toward ‘...a new category based on the partial incomplete, subject whose realization is not autonomy and independence but dependency and interdependence’(Davis 2002, 29). Thirdly, it is a non-representational approach to disability which requires us to recognize that *there are potentially ‘irreducible differences’ contained within the experience of disability*. These differences maybe hard to represent or articulate and they may require us to confront the limits of our thoughts and modes of representation (Chapter 4). Fourthly, it is *an approach to disability which values personal testimony but does not regard testimony as the only route to elucidating disabled people’s experiences*, rather insights from neurobiology and researcher reflections can also contribute to disability research.

Non-representational interpretations of landscape

So far I have revealed some of the key tenets of NRT and their implications for understanding the body, processes of disability. But how might another key concept in this thesis ‘landscape’ begin to be understood in light of non-representational theories? Through drawing attention to the emergent nature of embodiment and habitual elements of perception, NRT challenges naturalistic (backdrop) or socially constructed (representational) approaches to landscape, instead conceiving of the world as constantly in formation (cf. Ingold 2000). In this approach to landscape our interactions with the world are not pre-determined through discursive formations. Rather there is a greater emphasis on chance, potential and the intuition in our

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note how people with blindness or visual impairment who choose to walk in the countryside are choosing to be dependent on sighted guides and choosing to confront their lack of sight in landscapes that are difficult to navigate even with full sight. Their presence challenge any notion of disabled people as always giving priority to independence.

interactions with the world⁴¹ landscape in this formulation is a variably constituted hybrid, for once we let go of a fixed self or a fixed sense of embodiment, it clearly becomes harder to define that which is not-self. This non-representational approach to landscape as constantly in formation and a part of ourselves raises some interesting challenges for social scientists interested in the concept of landscape⁴².

As Chapter 1 began to show for ‘new’ cultural geographers (of the 1980s and 90s) landscape was primarily conceived of in terms of representation and as a ‘way of seeing’ (a product of a hegemonic scopic regime of the modern era – Cartesian Perspectivalism). Here Cosgrove (Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove 1985), Daniels (Daniels 1989; Daniels and Cosgrove 1993) and Nancy and James Duncan (Duncan and Duncan 1988) drew upon the language and theoretical insights of cultural studies to describe the landscape as a ‘signifying system’ or ‘a text’. While in a slightly different vein Matless, using Foucault, explored how landscapes dictate various forms of conduct (Matless 1992; 1995; 1996; 1998). Although their precise theoretical emphasis differed such ‘new’ cultural geographers demonstrated a recurring interest in the contested aspect of landscape representation, where to denaturalize the landscape concept and reveal the way in which it is a socially constructed, codified and disciplined way of seeing became somewhat of a theoretical orthodoxy of the eighties and nineties (Cloke 2003, 8)⁴³. While in feminist analysis this approach placed an emphasis on the gendered position of the observer (Rose 1992; 1993). Unfortunately this focus on the fixed and fixing nature of landscape has tended to keep the concept relegated to a distinct discursive and

⁴¹ However an interest in the embodied experiences of landscape and the way in which they escape language can be traced back to much earlier geographical engagements with the concept. For aesthetic geographer Vaugahn Cornish in his book ‘Scenery and the sense of sight’ (1935) ‘There are two sources of pleasure in the visual aspect of Scenery, the association of ideas and the physical satisfactions of the eye. The latter are not experienced as a local sensation, and so, being apprehended purely as emotions their origin is apt to escape recognition’ (xi-xii) While ‘The tactile sensation imparted by warm or cool air has never been, so to speak, intellectualised, and the still more important effect on respiration and circulation consequent upon change of temperature and relative humidity is not classed as a definite experience of sense. Yet these reactions, as fundamental as they are primitive, are indirectly of great importance to the visual appreciation of scenery, for they exercise a predisposing influence.’ (25.)

⁴² It is also a concept of landscape which shares parallels with early Chinese ideas of landscape as a process of incorporation mentioned in chapter 1 footnote 4 (Casey 2002).

⁴³ Cosgrove argues that an equation of landscape with the visual may be understood to have been a logical progression for Anglophone geographers given that since the Second World War national parks were established and demands grew for the identification and preservation of ‘scenic beauty’ and ‘landscape values’. While the development of R.S and GIS meant a focus on landscape as a visual space and space of interpretation (Cosgrove 2003).

representational domain limited to a particular version of a Western, 'ocular-centric' (Jay 1994) mode of seeing⁴⁴ and at a distance from attempts to theorize landscape as emergent through a hybrid set of relations and as part of non-linear, non-cartesian theories of time-space (for example Lefebvre 1991; Lefebvre and Regulier 1999).

While debate in 'new' cultural geography occurred at the time regarding the extent to which landscape maybe 'read' (Rose 1993; Smith 1993), in the wake of non-representational theory criticisms of such 'textualist' approaches to landscape have emerged in force (Thrift 1999; Rose 2002; Wylie 2002; Cresswell 2003). A key concern for followers of NRT is that while 'new' cultural geographies acknowledged some of the affects of individual human agency in the production of landscape, they tended to rely on structuralist concepts such as hegemony, ideology and naturalized discourse as the major form of explanation for the production of landscape (Rose 2002). Unfortunately, such representational/textualist approaches to landscape only access one element of what landscape is, how landscape operates and what it could be, for they conflate landscape knowledge (a particular truth generated about landscape in a distinct historical period) with landscape thought (the processes which led up to the creation of such concepts and knowledge).

Thrift (1999) draws upon the work of Ingold (1995) to critique accounts, such as those found in New Cultural Geography, which tend to treat landscape as a system of representation or as a physical substrate to which meaning is necessarily attached prior to action. Instead Thrift argues (pace Ingold) that that the space of landscape is an on-going 'accomplishment' (made not found)⁴⁵. In this rendering of landscape as

⁴⁴ While the powerful connection of landscape with a particular 'ocular centric' way of seeing should not be ignored, the reduction of landscape to this particular way of seeing rests on an interpretation of landscape as solely a modern, Western concept and this is not necessarily the case. For example, Mitchel (1994) argues that the terms of the debate were narrowed in new cultural geography to uncover power relations inherent in representations of landscape where, 'The agreement on these three basic "facts" ... the "Westernness" of landscape, its modernity, and its visual/pictorial essence – may well be a sign of just how well founded they are.' (7) Interestingly, Cosgrove (2003) founder of the 'way of seeing' approach to landscape which is critiqued by Mitchell, in a short discussion of Geomancy in the design of gardens in China and Japan suggested that: 'Such concepts prompt us to move landscape beyond the confines of the visual towards more imaginative and encompassing embodiments that are at once sensual and cognitive' (266).

⁴⁵ Interestingly, to support this argument he chooses to draw upon the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold (1995 99) who utilises Heidegger's Dwelling perspective, strategically ignoring the earlier and rather similar work of humanistic geographer Relph who also utilises also advocates a dwelling perspective (REF).

accomplishment, landscape can no longer be considered as solely a representation, discourse, way of seeing or the material context for human action. Rather, the concept of landscape encompasses the ways in which landscape is thought, enacted and produced – emergent from multi-sensuous practices. Landscape cannot be a pre-ordained whole, instead embodied practices such as walking open up particular spaces of landscape – they become disclosive (Wylie 2003; Wylie 2005). Such an approach to landscape acknowledges the importance of the body in the constitution of landscape without resorting to the individualizing arguments of previous humanistic and phenomenologically inspired approaches (Grano and Paasi 1929; Tuan 1974; Meinig 1979; Tuan 1979; Jackson 1980; Relph 1981; Porteous 1985; Porteous 1993) or endorsing the deterministic evolutionary theories of ‘landscape preference’ advocated by some environmental psychologists (Appleton 1975)⁴⁶.

Thus, while Macnaughten and Urry (2000), in their editorial of a special issue on ‘Bodies of nature’, attempt to retain a distinction between landscape as a way of seeing and nature as a form of embodiment, they argue that ‘Landscape...involves appearance or look...of leisure, relaxation and visual consumption by visitors. There is nothing ‘natural’ about ‘landscape’ (Macnaughten and Urry 2000, 6). Following insights from NRT, it is clear that such neat distinctions are impossible to sustain in practice. For Wylie, ‘The problem is that once landscape is understood as being formed, firstly ‘in the mind’ or within ‘cultural discourse’, and then projected outward onto matter then we are once again firmly in the grip of Cartesian dualism’ (Wylie 2003, 142). This Cartesian dualism is problematic for it undermines attempts to show the ways in which landscapes and bodies contribute to each others processes of formation. Landscape is neither ‘raw’ nature nor pure culture or ‘way of seeing’ laid down on this physical substrate.

This means that what counts as explanation in the study of bodies and landscapes cannot be confined to the textual. Therefore an increasing number of social and cultural theorists are thinking through the significance of insights from neuroscience

⁴⁶ Through an emphasis on the inter-subjective, contextual and potentially fallable nature of an individual’s statements about landscape NRT also calls into question the sphere of validity of research which relies solely on individuals stating ‘their’ experience of landscapes (see for example Kroh and Gimblett, 1992; Ward-Thompson, 1998)

and physiology for our understanding of socio-embodied life (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Varela 1999; Connely 2002; Massumi 2002; Deleuze and Guattari 2004). This is important, for as Connely (2002) argues:

Every theory of culture bears an implicit relation to biology and biological theory. The more cultural theorists try to avoid this gritty terrain, the more they either implicitly recapitulate one of two classical conceptions of nature that have long contended for primacy in Euro-American life or levitate toward a disembodied model of thinking, culture and ethics that is difficult to sustain. (3)⁴⁷

Of course it is foolish to extrapolate directly from any domain of inquiry to another. Bio-medical sciences and neuroscience tend to be committed to a methodological individualism which risks returning us to a deflated conception of the body as a bounded biological entity. So rather than simply unquestioningly presenting insights from neuroscience, it is perhaps helpful to think about how biological impulses and bodily dispositions are just one element of human experience, variably distributed along a nature-culture continuum depending on the specific context. As Massumi (2002) writes:

The point is that the “natural” and the “cultural” feed forward and back into each other. They relay each other to such an extent that the distinction cannot be maintained in any strict sense. It is necessary to theorize a *nature-culture continuum*. Logical operations prolong and convert forces already in nature, and forces of nature divert into cultural operations normatively regulated (ruled) by the logical conversion. Nature and culture are a mutual movement into and through each other. Their continuum is a dynamic unity of reciprocal variation. Things we are accustomed to placing on one side or another of the nature-culture divide must be redistributed along the whole

⁴⁷ The two models of nature which Connely refers to here are a phenomenological sense of nature which tends to result in a notion of ‘...essentially embodied selves attuned to thick universals or an intrinsic purpose’ and a scientific law like model of nature which results in culture being cordoned off from this realm (Connely 2002, 3).

length of the continuum, under varying modes of operation, in various phases of separation and regrouping, and to different degrees of “purity”. (11)

Reconceptualising landscape along this nature-culture continuum means that distinctions between matter and thought; body and object; and cultures of gazing on the landscape and the material topographic landscape beneath our feet become difficult to sustain for all these things relay in ‘reciprocal becomings’ (Masumi 2002, 11). Landscape becomes a process of becoming at various points along a nature-culture continuum (cf. Rose 2002)⁴⁸. It means that landscape is not a fixed delimitable concept that we can apply in the rest of this thesis, rather it must change as it comes into contact with empirical circumstance. For concepts are not mimetic, rather they immersed in the changing state of things. The concept ‘...has no reference: it is self-referential, it posits itself and its object at the same time as it is created’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 22). Concepts do not provide a truth independent of the plane upon which they were constructed (Patton 1996) ‘...a concept always has the truth that falls to it as a function of the conditions of its creation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 27). As Masumi (2002) writes,

If you apply a concept or system of connection between concepts, it is the material you apply it to that undergoes change, much more markedly than do the concepts. The change is imposed upon the material by the concepts’ systemicity and constitutes a becoming homologous of the material to the system. This is all very grim. It has less to do with “more to the world” than “more of the same.” It has less to do with invention than mastery and control. (17)

Like other post-structural thinkers, Deleuze and Masumi advocate a sort of letting go of concepts as fixed entities and an acknowledgement of the truth which falls to them as a result of their creation. However in letting go of the landscape concept we may risk sacrificing some of the critical/political power of ‘a’ landscape concept (such as that advocated by Cosgrove where landscape equates to a form of visual

⁴⁸ Although it is worth noting how earlier work in geography including Pred, A. (1984). "Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74(2): 279. also places emphasis on the ways in which places are always in the process of formation and becoming.

ideology) in order to develop more complex interpretations. For as Cosgrove has argued, ‘...in landscape we are dealing with an ideologically-charged and very complex cultural product, one that will not easily yield to fashionable changes in geographical methodology’ (Cosgrove 1984, 11). This means that non-representational approaches to landscape have received varied reception amongst an academic community of diverse political orientation (Cosgrove 2003; Cresswell 2003; Hinchcliffe 2003).

It is Wylie and Rose (2006) who appear to have been most keen to build on non-representational thought in order to develop what they refer to as a ‘post-phenomenological’ perspective on landscape. In a recent editorial they set out some new directions for landscape research. For them ‘landscape is a tension’ and ‘...the concept is productive and precise for this reason and no other’(476). They suggest that the challenge for landscape researchers is to recognize the ways in which landscape ‘animates’ arguing that landscape is irreducible to, but exists in complex relations with, both our individual sensuous engagements and discursive and ideological orders. For them the value of the landscape concept is that it gives depth to the ‘topological sensibilities’ pervasive in recent geographical theorising (cf. Thrift 1999, on place) for it ‘...reintroduces perspective and contour; texture and feeling; perception and imagination’(Rose and Wylie 2006, 477). However, in their separate articles in their edited collection on landscape Rose and Wylie diverge somewhat in their deployment of the landscape concept.

Wylie (2006) critiques ocular-centric interpretations of landscape wedded to a specific type of ‘ocular-centric’ visuality associated with a self conscious and desiring social subject for they occlude other more embedded, mobile ways of seeing and experiencing landscape (Jay 1994). Instead, Wylie seeks to ‘...reconstruct theoretically the visual gaze upon the landscape by exploring the ontological processes...which afford its actualization’ (Wylie 2006, 522). This means for Wylie landscape is ‘...the materialities and sensibilities with which *we see*.’ (Wylie 2006 519, my emphasis). This is a visual sense of landscape also evident in his earlier auto-ethnographic accounts of an ascent of Glastonbury tor (Wylie 2002) and a walk on the South West coast path (Wylie 2005) where Wylie focuses on the relations between walking, sight and landscape. Here, following Deleuze, ‘...rather than

conceiving of the subject as a point of view upon the world, a gaze, we need to imagine an eventful world of anonymous gazes, perspectives, which a subject *may* emerge to occupy, and *may* crystallise within' (Wylie 2006, 529).

This idea of an emergent subject within a world of gazes may be a potentially helpful way in which to conceive of how people with blindness encounter landscape. It certainly offers a different theoretical approach from earlier cultural geographical approaches to 'ways of seeing' landscape, for it places an emphasis on how the position of the landscape observer is not necessarily fixed, but rather is contingent and emerges from a range of possibilities and gazes 'which a subject *may* emerge to occupy'. However, Wylie's focus on sight and the gaze risk a slippage into a normative assumption that gazing is a possible and available situation to all. Clearly this is an assumption which those who are blind or visually impaired may contest through their embodied presence in the landscape. Further, Wylie (2002; 2006) in his auto-ethnographies tends to focus primarily on how our sense of being a subject arises out of our sensuous engagement. This phenomenological emphasis seems to present a dangerously apolitical sense of landscape which sidesteps issues regarding the way in which landscape continues to be a 'project' of ascribing meaning and value⁴⁹ and how landscape as a site of power-knowledge that guides subjects to particular statements and practices.

While it is important to re-conceptualize landscape in the wake of NRT it is also important to acknowledge how landscape comes with the weight of numerous past associations. Wylie's reconciliation between the structuring aspects of landscape culture and phenomenological insights into sensuous engagement is too heavily weighted to the sensuous and it can only be this way because his research subject is himself and his own interactions. Therefore, while his insights are valid they have a very limited sphere of applicability. As Castree and Macmillan argue, surely '...any non-representational 'alternative' should not be seen as jettisoning the substantial power of representational acts' (Castree and Macmillan 2004, 469). For a concern with texts and representations on the one hand and, practices, doings and embodied knowledge on the other, are not mutually exclusive approaches to knowledge (Nash

⁴⁹ Such projects of inscription can be found for example, in work on the planning tool 'Landscape Character Assessment' (Scott, 2002)

2000; Smith 2001). Therefore, I agree with Rose (2006) when he argues that ‘what is missing from Wylie’s [2002] account...is a discussion of how this coming-upon-subjectivity though movement is itself imagined, cultivated, and cared for as a form of presence’(546).

For Rose, drawing on Derrida’s notion of ‘dreams of presence’ the interesting thing about landscape is ‘...a fundamental inclination toward a metaphysics of presence’ (479) (see also Rose 2004). Thus, Rose calls for us to ‘....reorient the study of landscapes away from analysing landscapes as systems of presence to exploring them as dreams of presence; that is, as intimate collections of material sensations where other dreams of presence (dreams of who we are, of where we belong and of how we get on with life) are consigned’ (539). What he appears to be getting at here is that while previously cultural geographers have analysed landscapes as systems of representation (what he refers to as ‘systems of presence’) landscape also signifies something broader about the human condition and our inclination to fix ideas - that is ‘dream of presence’ despite the proccessual, constantly emergent nature of existence. This inclination to fix means that while theoretically landscapes may present us with a multitude of possibilities only certain possibilities tend to be actualized. For Rose ‘dreams of presence’ ‘...are a means of attempting to hold onto the worlds that always eludes our grasp’ (545) and are ‘...indicative of an active desire to mark the world and orient becoming in the face of alterity and the anxious emptiness it presents’ (547). Dreams of presence help to explain stasis given the primacy of process, they help to explain order out of chaos (cf. Massumi 2002, 9-10). Here:

Conceptualizing the cultural landscape as a dream of presence means understanding it as an unfolding plane of sensory, affective or perceptual markers registering and, thus, effecting the emergence... of subjectivity. Yet, critically, it is also an *active* depositing of those markers through a movement of care. (Rose 2006, 547)

Interestingly this notion of a ‘dream of presence’ seems to be useful way to understand some of the practices and findings of this research. Firstly because a push toward a metaphysics of presence and collective truth is a theme particularly pertinent to my empirical findings regarding the way in which blind and visually

impaired people talk of their experiences of walking in the landscape. For example I will show some of the complex ways in which people who are experiencing the onset of a visual impairment experience both a culturally and physiological ‘holding onto’ the sighted world, its pictures, language, concepts and notions and demonstrate a keen inclination toward association with sighted concepts despite their increasing bodily differences (Chapter 7). Secondly, the notion of dreams of presence is applicable to the academic endeavour of research (see also Harrison 2006). As an ethnographer, ‘dreams of presence’ have at times been evident in my desire to identify with, share the goals of and be understood by research participants. While this research project, like any other, has involved a considerable degree of ‘holding onto’ – an academic culture of holding onto certain, themes, ideas and concepts in the face of an otherwise all too ‘anxious emptiness’ of endless difference. Thus while Thrift’s NRT may draw attention to a world in transformation and constant becoming, research and events continue to demand a decision (Caputo 2003, 106), and only certain possibilities can be actualized for as researchers we are in the business of ‘fixing’, speaking and representing however tentatively.

Potential features of non-representational research accounts of landscapes and embodiment

In this final section I wish to think through the implications of NRT for a research account of landscapes and the body. NRT demands an understanding of the way in which the body and landscape are always in the process of formation and emerge through reciprocal interactions (‘becomings’), which are variably positioned along a nature-culture continuum. This re-conceptualization ‘...requires different styles of thinking through, and with, the worlds we find ourselves in.’ (Latham and Conradson 2003, 1902). This has implications for what counts as relevant material in my literature reviews (for example Chapters 2, 3 and 4 think through the ‘non’ or ‘extra’ discursive in traditional representations and explanations of landscape, walking and blindness); for whom and what gets to ‘speak’ in the research accounts; the research approach and methods; what counts as explanation and the styles in which research data is presented.

Testimony

In this research I utilise the interview testimonies of people with blindness about their experiences in the countryside, for their voices contribute a unique and relatively unheard perspective on experiences of landscape. However, while it has been argued that ‘....it is surprising what non-specialists can and do turn into words when ethnographies are conducted appropriately, in sufficient detail, with members of carefully chosen subject communities’ (Cloke et al. 2004, 189). Doing research in light of NRT means we cannot simply ‘hoover up’ themes such as embodiment and sensation from personal testimony. Rather, it is important to reflect on the ‘sphere of applicability’ of such subjective testimony (Massumi, 2002, 3) and to the potential of landscape and the body to be otherwise to reported experience; for there is no utterly subjective, socially constructed world (Clark 2003). This means in this thesis I attend to what testimony *can speak of* (Chapter 4) but also its possible limits, the ‘unspeakable’ (Harrison 2006) for we can sense more than we can say. It does this through the use of insights from neurobiology and through reflections on potential taboo topics. Taboo topics which maybe explained by the particular histories, cultures and contexts of landscape, walking and blindness (discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4). Finally NRT draws attention to the way in which innovative methods and writing styles help us to explore how we might get at what is not necessarily spoken of by research subjects, at the fleeting, sensuous and irreducible qualities of social life and how embodied practices such as walking may affect what is and isn’t thought or spoken.

Writing and presentational styles

‘...in order to write experimentally you have to be willing to “affirm” even your own stupidity’ (Massumi 2002, 18).

NRT requires an acknowledgement of the excessive nature of the subject which is constantly in formation (perpetual becoming) and for who testimony is only ever partial explanation. Like ANT, writing and re-presentations in the wake of NRT must address how landscape comes about through the sensuous engagement of our bodies in conjunction with (and extended through) objects, clothing, ideas, material

topography and dispositions (Chapter 6, 7, 8, 9). Our writing and presentational styles should also allow space for this impossibility or incompleteness of testimony as explanation (Harrison 2006), and the ‘stupidity’ and constructed nature of researcher knowledge. If we do not recognize these limits to both researcher and researched knowledge then representations of external others such as those with blindness and visual impairment will bare the marks of the researchers ‘deadening gaze’ (Phelan 1993, 26). However, we must also be wary, for questions regarding what can be put into words and what is lost in the process of representation can be a source of dangerously seductive fascination. In acknowledging the limits of our own knowledge we risk self absorption or self annihilation (Phelan 1993). This is evident in early romantic accounts of landscape and the sublime (Chapter 1). Therefore it is important to be both playful *and* vigilant (Clark 2003).

Inspired to some extent by NRT, recent work in geography has attended to the significance of gaps, holes, hauntings and contradiction and has begun to write through and re-present some of the irreducible and sensuous qualities of lived experience (Pinder 2001; McCormack 2002; Crouch 2003; Dewsbury 2003; Lorimer and Lund 2003). Such work is inspired by, and may be understood to follow a tradition of writing emerging from the so called ‘Frankfurt School’ in the late 1920s and early 1930s associated with the work of writers such as Adorno and Benjamin. It also builds on established traditions of writing in the arts and humanities which attempt to grapple with the limits of language⁵⁰ and on earlier writing in geography which attempts to get at the complex, fragmented nature of human experience (Pred 1984; Pred 1995). Latham (2003) in a own photo diary montage takes inspiration from Pred’s montage and time geography in order to bring to the fore the constructed nature of researcher authority, acknowledging the performative element of the research process itself. My own research has taken inspiration from such ‘non-representational’ research accounts and their attention to written and presentational styles by developing an essay based around photos, fieldnotes and a set of video clips (Chapter 6).

⁵⁰ Samuel Beckett’s work the ‘unnameable’ is just one classic example of this (Beckett, 1994)

Combining interview testimony with researcher observations, photo/video recordings and innovative writing and presentational styles has helped to capture and re-present some of the *qualities* of blind experiences of the countryside. However, some aspects of human experience also require recourse to scientific insights from physiology, ophthalmology and neuroscience for further elucidation. As Thrift writes, ‘...the biological constitution of being has to be taken into account if performative force is ever to be understood.’ (Thrift 1997, 59). Disability and cultural theorists have tended to be resistant to exploring such neuro-biological qualities of social life, often for fear of returning to forms of biological reductionism (Corker and Shakespear 2002)⁵¹. However, in thinking through how landscape emerges at various points along a nature-culture continuum, I have attended to insights from ophthalmology into the physical qualities of visual impairment (Chapter 7) and phenomenologically inspired traditions of Neuroscience advanced by Antonio Damasio (1999) and Francisco Varela (1992; 1996; 1999) (Chapters 6,7,8,9).

Innovative methods

While NRT forms part of an upsurge of interest in the intuitive, embodied, emotional and affective qualities of human experience (Nast and Pile, 1998; Massumi, 2002; Dewsbury, 2003; Davidson, 2004) and requires us to view the world in a more experimental manner (Thrift 2003) it is argued that in cultural geography our research methods and modes of presentation have failed to keep up with this theoretical talk (Thrift, 2000; Latham, 2003; Crang 2005). Certainly to date NRT has, perhaps most notably, sent geographers scurrying to the library to consider the minutiae of theories of the subject which are excessive, multiple and distributed. For example, Dewsbury suggests ‘...an overview of Giles Deleuze's thinking as a possible apprenticeship in becoming able to perceive, and hence better able to express, the under represented world of emotional and intuitive bodies’ (Dewsbury 2003, 1908). However, while NRT requires us to think through its philosophical underpinnings it should not be interpreted as an excuse *only* to theorise more, for theory needs to make contact with everyday events in order to be put to use, explained and transformed (cf. Laurier and Philo 2006). Thus, my own apprenticeship has also included acting as a sighted guide with blind and visually

⁵¹ Although a clear exception which comes to mind here is the work of Nickolas Rose (Rose 2006)

impaired walkers and reflecting on this learning process in order to perceive and express the world of emotional and intuitive bodies' (Chapters 5-9).

While accusations circulate regarding the relative lack of innovative methods in social scientific research; recent experiments with methods have included walking ethnography (Kusenbach, 2003), participant diaries (Latham 2003), video clip analysis (Laurier and Philo, 2003) and artistic practice (Tolia-Kelly 2006). While these methods do not provide a 'quick fix' to researching the embodied sensuous nature of existence they have started to open up different aspects of the real in our research accounts; explicitly confronting the fact that social researchers are key to generating their research productions (Whatmore 2006) and elucidating elements of life which may not be available to access through traditional qualitative methods such as the interview or focus group.

Of course we must also acknowledge that there is an irresolvable paradox at the heart of research which tries to bring embodied, practised 'non-representational' landscapes into the representational moment. For in the act of representation, something is lost, and even if we use novel forms of research presentation such as video cameras, drawings, photos or diaries aimed to evoke certain feelings in our audiences we cannot guarantee they are the ones we intended. In the methodology and empirical chapters I explore these difficulties in more depth and outline my own methodological response to some of the challenges posed by NRT (Chapter 5).

The ethical and political: producing open dispositions

In following a non-representational approach to research this thesis draws attention to the level of everyday embodied practice, however, this does not mean this work is apolitical. Rather, NRT (like much feminist theory) requires us to expand classical conceptions of the remit of politics and the political subject and think through the way in which politics is also part of our everyday engagements with and enactments of the world. This is not just about the way in which certain ideologies filter down, are practiced, reproduced and contested at the level of the individual – for an excellent examples of this approach in terms of landscape, see the Foucauldian

inspired work of Matless⁵² (1992; 1995;1996; 1998). Rather, this is also about the way in which everyday encounters can be thought through and cultivated in order to help build citizens with generous open dispositions. Here politics is concerned with ‘...producing dispositions which are open to the moment’ (Thrift 2004, 97) and it is about ‘cultivated inclinations’ (Varela 1999), where non-representational thought and research in geography can help ‘...form the ‘people to come’ rather than be drawn back into the *a priori* segmentations into which society tries to sort us.’ (Thrift 2004, 93). In this new kind of ‘affective politics’ (Massumi 2000) work inspired by NRT can be orientated toward ‘....refining the perceptual toolkits necessary to build moral stances’(Thrift 2004, 93). The empirical element of this thesis dwells on these ‘perceptual toolkits’ and the ways in which they are deployed by walkers with blindness and their sighted guides.

⁵² In many ways Matless’ work continues to be exemplary historical landscape scholarship, retaining a complex, context dependent interpretation of landscape as simultaneously a vehicle of social and self identity, a site for the claiming of cultural authority and a lived space. Of particular interest in this thesis is the ways in which he connects particular ways of seeing landscape with disciplined practices of bodily comportment, dress and exercise, which signified in diverse ways, propaganda for a ‘landscaped’ form of ordered citizenship. This form of ordered citizenship finds it’s echoes in studies of contemporary rambling groups (Darby 2000).

Chapter 3 – Walking: endorphins, opiates and collective engagements

Synopsis

In light of the non-representational emphasis on how embodied practice opens up particular spaces, this chapter outlines the potential ‘spaces of landscape’ which might be opened up by the walking body and ‘spaces of the body’ which might be opened up by walking in order to inform subsequent analysis of the empirical research. The chapter reviews some Western traditions of walking practice from contemporary traditions of athletic endeavor, to pilgrimage, to the politicized urban and rural walking practices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Motives for walking in landscape are found to be irreducible to the visual apprehension of scenic landscape. Rather, walking is motivated by a variable mix of corporeal, emotional, cultural and mental stimuli, which are fuelled by anything from manufactured opiates to endorphins and collective political sentiments. I argue that three key aspects of a walker that must be borne in mind in any analysis of walking practice: First, a walker must be understood to have the potential to subvert ‘conventional’ practices and ‘conventional’ avenues of discourse (a concern of non-representational theorists). Second, a walker’s body must be understood to be the site of culturally ingrained, unconscious dispositions and attunements which transcend structure-agency dualisms. And Third, a walker’s current experience must be understood as always emerging in conjunction with their past environments through processes of habitual action, relationality and interconnection.

Introduction

Walking in rural space in order to see landscape is only one of many potential pedestrian motives. People walk in their leisure time for all sorts of reasons and in all sorts of ways. People may saunter, pace, march or ramble in solitude or in groups for politics, principles, sanity and health or simply because they have nothing better to do (Edensor 1998; Edensor 2000; Solnit 2000; Amato 2004; Ingold 2004). While other non-Western traditions of walking practice indicate the range of potentials of the walking body, I tend to focus on Western traditions, for these may be considered the most historically relevant contextual material. As Amato’s (2004) and Solnit’s (2000) histories of Anglo-American walking practices begin to show, it takes at least a whole volume to document such a variety of walking encounters, and it is not my intention to repeat this history here. Rather, I want to focus on some key moments of

walking practice which reveal some of the *potentials* of the walking body. In particular I will focus on the contemporary walking body and the connections between walking and health; the walking of pilgrims and the endurance of pain for some perceived higher goal; romantic attempts to walk themselves outside of discourse; urban philosophies of walking practice as a mode of resistance and the rational recreation movements of the Victorian era and early twentieth century.

Walking must be understood to exist at a variety of points along a spectrum of ‘culturally’ influenced activity. Walking is neither pure biological affect nor does it solely revolve around linguistic meaning; in fact, it often occupies the middle ground between these two extremes. For example, walking is not only a subject of thoughts, it is also a practice, which can influence the direction and content of our thoughts. As Solnit (2000) writes,

...the rhythm of walking generates a rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. A new thought often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as thinking were travelling rather than making. (5)

Walking, self elevation and embodied dispositions

In Great Britain walking as a form of recreation, particularly walking in rural areas is an immensely popular contemporary pass time. It is estimated that there are 1,125 million day visitors to the countryside per annum with 32% of these involved in walking or rambling as the main activity (Report of the 2002-3 Great Britain Day Visits Survey 2003) and 35% of adults from households in England are estimated to have participated in a walk of over 2 miles for recreation in the past 4 weeks (results from the general household survey of 2002/2003 Fox and Richards 2004). Such contemporary walking practices are underpinned and represented by a wealth of guides, novels, radio programmes and books which direct the walkers attention to particular scenic landscapes and points of interest, glorify the walker’s personal

struggles under adversity and at times promote walking as far and as fast as possible and of mountaineering to the highest peaks.

Thrift (2000c), in a recent article 'Still Life', builds on his non-representational insights and argues that the power of the meanings churned out by the cultural industry, which has grown up around the practice of walking for pleasure, are now founded in a range of body practices which promote and value the 'intensification of present experience' such as Yoga, Pilates, the Alexander Technique and dance therapy. These body practices stretch out particular moments in time by paying detailed attention to them and encourage certain embodied apprehensions of nature/landscape in Anglo-American experience. Thrift argues that such body practices contribute to the creation of bodily instincts, or what Thrift refers to as 'territories of becoming' – a set of embodied dispositions which may be 'biologically wired in' and 'culturally sedimented' and which give rise to an 'embodied unconscious' habits of movement and engagement. Thrift (2000c) writes that,

...these contemplative and mystical developments which taken as a whole, are widespread in modern Western societies, constitute a background within which nature is apprehended and which provides quite particular experiences of what nature is. They form, if you like, an embodied 'unconscious', a set of basic exfoliations of the body through which nature is constructed, planes of affect attuned to particular body parts (and senses) and corresponding elements of nature. (45)

For Thrift 'immersive practices' such as Yoga and Pilates are thought to be producing a new form of 'vitalism' or 'stance to feeling life' '...which explain many of the strong and sometimes even fanatical investments that are placed on the 'natural' (Thrift 2000c, 45-46). He proceeds to suggest that against this 'background':

As walking becomes a natural practice to be indulged in for its own sake...it can become a means of contact with the Earth, to be at one with 'nature', even to be deemed therapeutic. It becomes a means of gathering stillness,

without having to stay still, a means of contemplation and mystical communion to be found within the body. (46)

Thrift's speculation that contemporary body practices such as yoga now effect how 'we' walk and how 'we' apprehend nature is an interesting application of his non-representational ideas. For, as we have seen in Chapter Two, in NRT, culture is understood to not only be about signification but is about embodied dispositions and habits. It, therefore, makes sense to suggest that as cultures of the body in one work or leisure context change so do cultures of the body or bodily dispositions in another context (we will see this later with reference to how the urban working classes adopted walking practices to get away from the structures of their working lives). However, Thrift's argument is over-stretched. Firstly, practices such as Yoga and Pilates are taken up differentially amongst the population and tend to form a small proportion of leisure time, thus they may have no major effect on our embodied unconscious. Secondly, while Thrift highlights 'contemplative' and 'mystical' developments, of at least equal significance is the growing interest in health related behaviour which far from 'forging new forms of vitalism', places a faith in pedometers, GPS, calorie counters and mileages (see for example Lorimer and Lund 2003).

However, most importantly for this discussion is that while Thrift argues that 'The background (an embodied unconscious which intensifies and values moments of 'stillness') has allowed the foreground of symbolic delegates to develop'(Thrift 2000c,46) I would suggest that we can presume no such necessary ordering of walking experience. Neither the body and its culturally ingrained attunements, nor the guidebook can be understood in terms of foregrounds and backgrounds. Rather they exist amongst an array of political and personal rationales, motivations and experiences of walking which fold into each other generating 'circuits of positive affective value'(Ahmed 2004) around walking practices and visits to scenic landscape. As such the rest of this chapter is concerned with attending to some of the *range* of potentials that a walker's body might occupy, rationales for walking practice and histories of Anglo-American walking practice which are potentially relevant to contemporary walkers with blindness.

The walking body

As soon as the walker begins to get up off their chair and put one foot in front of the other they are engaging complex muscular kinaesthetic systems which enable them to locate their limbs without looking at them, achieve balance, movement and propulsion (Rodaway 1994). After twenty minutes of brisk walking by the average adult endorphins will begin to be released and cardio-vascular and muscular fitness will begin to be built and felt (Lamb et al. 2002). Distances and measurements have historically been associated with the walking body - e.g. 'the foot', or the mile (from *mile*, a thousand paces). Some other quite common elements of experiencing the mind-body relationship when hill walking include walking rhythm, endorphin release, exhaustion and elevation. These things may effect the extent of thoughts and chatter which emerge during the day. For the average sighted and able bodied participant the thoughts and chatter of a day in the hills may emerge in quite particular ways. For example, research has shown how on flat terrain walkers start off with ease and are able to talk with easily for little concentration is required to be directed at the terrain. However as walkers ascend breath becomes laboured, bodies and mind tire and concentration is turned to navigating more difficult terrain, rather than discussion (Lorimer and Lund 2003).

While over the course of our lifetime we will inhabit a diversity of embodiments of varying degrees of similarity to others. There are some common features or general tendencies of bodies which walk. The fact that walking increases fitness means that walking links into a range of other long-term health benefits. For example, regular walking over twenty minutes each day can have the effect of relieving depression, pre-menstrual syndrome and anxiety and reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, diabetes, cancer, hypertension and obesity (Lamb et al. 2002). Walking outdoors is also found to have more beneficial effects than exercise taken indoors due to the mood enhancing effects of daylight and thermoregulation which means that in cold outdoor temperatures the body is working hard to retain its core temperature.

Walking with others also has psychological benefits beyond those connected to fitness, for example increased social contact is thought to lead to an enhanced sense of well being and self esteem (Scully et al. 1998). Some of these benefits of walking have even become patented as a formal therapeutic method (Cogswell 1993).

Drawing upon lay versions of such medical discourses which promote and value

exercise increasing numbers of people are thought to make ‘...producing and maintaining fitness a lifetime body project’ (Freund and Martin 2004, 273). That is a reflexive project of elevating the self, literally and metaphorically.

While general features of walking for the average able bodied participant can be identified we must also note walking is not a universal capacity, for those disabled since birth, through ill health, old age or war, walking cannot be taken for granted. Metaphors such as ‘walking tall’, ‘standing on two feet’ and ‘taking great strides’ are all based upon an able body and cannot be assumed to have universal application (Oliver 1993). We must, therefore, be wary of accounts of walking which continually ground understanding in a normative able body and assume that we will all be able to walk and be able to walk in the same ways.

The average distance people walk in a year has declined in the last 3 decades from 255 miles in 1975 to 196 miles in 2004 (ONS 2004). Such a decline in regular walking combined with rising levels of obesity and an evidence base for walking being good for health, means that walking is now promoted for health through ‘healthy walk initiatives’ linked into primary care treatment, pedometer use and leaflets which equate distances walked into calories burnt (NICE 2006) (a far cry from Thrift’s ‘contemplative’ and ‘mystical’ insights into walking practice). As government policy the promotion of walking is justified on environmental grounds for it is likely to reduce car use, while ‘walking school buses’ and ‘healthy walk initiatives’ are found to be a relatively cheap and effective way of increasing activity in adults (Lamb et al. 2002). It seems that ‘...health has become a central motif for the organization of our lives within late modern Western society’ (Brown and Duncan 2002, 367). Where walking initiatives maybe understood to be a form of ‘governance’ designed to ensure the health of the citizen and the nation.

While for some walking twenty minutes each day is a major achievement, for others walking and other fitness practices become highly addictive behaviours and may even form part of a culture of ‘competitive individualism’ characteristic of contemporary capitalist society (Gilbert 2004). Endorphins released during exercise resemble opiates and the addictive nature of these has warranted comparison with drug-induced addictive behaviours (Werme et al. 2000). The addictive nature of

exercise means that ceasing regular physical activity can result in opposite feelings such as unease, anxiety and guilt (Scully et al. 1998). In New Zealand there are the annual 'self-transcendence' races (2005) where people attempt to run as far and as fast as possible in 24 hours with some competitors managing to reach over 200km in this time period. For the promoters of this race,

Every single time we take to the road, forest or track, we challenge the limits of our bodies, minds and beliefs, one mile at a time, and prove to ourselves and the world that the human body and spirit is capable of far more than we normally dare to imagine.

While such extremes of physical endurance tend to be reified in our contemporary culture and may physically empower and physiologically elevate individuals, participants may also be hooked on exercise for a range of emotional and neurological reasons. Exercise can exhaust us emotionally, so that we simply become too tired to think about our troubles, things which seem stressful pre-exercise are no longer found to be stressful post exercise (Lamb et al. 2002). Fyonna Campbell walked 20,000 miles around the world, yet what was significant to her seemed to be not so much the walk itself so much as the potential for escape from the emotions engendered through a poor relationship with her father (Campbell 1996). For Campbell walking became redemptive. A route through which to elevate the self and rise above everyday anxieties; these are qualities of walking also found in the walks of pilgrims.

Pilgrimage, Pain and Endorphin Release

Pilgrim walking practices forge and exploit clear relationships between physical and spiritual elevation; pain and the sacred. In Europe since the early middle ages pilgrims have walked to shrines and graves of local saints in places such as Santiago de Compostela, Rome and Jerusalem (Amato 2004, 51). Pilgrims in such contexts may travel barefoot or with stones in their shoes. They may carry heavy crosses or wear special penitential garments. An understanding of such pilgrim practice and the pain endured by pilgrims may help us to understand other forms of walking practice, for the practice of contemporary travellers who walk in search of self-renewal blurs

the distinctions between pilgrims, tourists and other walkers (Badone and Roseman 2004).

There is an ongoing connection between walking, pilgrim practice, pain and the sacred. By the early twentieth century walkers who visited the countryside were being heralded by aesthetic geographer Vaughan Cornish as 'Pilgrims of Scenery' (Cornish 1935) for here the immensity of the landscape is thought to have engendered a sense of humility as well as awe; an essential component to the religious welfare of the nation (Matless 1995, 107). Another outgrowth of the pilgrimage is to be found in the late twentieth century popularity of charity and awareness raising walks where physical exertion and charitable sentiment combine (Solnit 2000, 55). While contemporary Irish pilgrims, many barefoot, still climb Croagh Patrick in honour of St Patrick on the last Sunday of July; in Sabari Malai, Southern India pilgrims undertake a walk of over 40 miles barefoot to mark the path of the Son of Shiva and his encounter and resistance of a beautiful demonness. This barefoot journey involves great pain for the heat of the sun on the ground blisters the soles of the pilgrims' feet (Glucklich 2001, 36-38). Why bother to endure so much pain through walking?

Anthropologists have done the most sustained research on pilgrimage and they have tended to interpret pilgrim practice from a cultural and historical perspective through ethnographic work (Eade and Sallnow 1990). Anthropologist Victor Turner had a strong influence on this field of anthropological pilgrim research. For Turner (1974), who based the majority of his studies on Christian traditions, pilgrimage entails reaching a liminal state – between past and future identities and outside of usual social structures. This experience produces a special social bond that he refers to as 'communitas', where communitas is a sort of egalitarian association between pilgrims who in this walking context are supposedly, temporarily freed of their hierarchical secular roles.

Contemporary writing on pilgrimage has tended to critique Turner's approach for its reliance upon overly stable understandings of identity and place. Contemporary pilgrim research tends to highlight the complex and fragmentary nature of many pilgrimage contexts and identities (Eade and Sallnow 1990; Slavin 2003). This

parallels work on contemporary walking practice in Britain which also highlights the multiple identities that walkers may perform (Darby 2000; Edensor 2000; Lorimer and Lund 2003). However, this is not to say that some sense of 'communitas' does not occur in pilgrimage and other group walking contexts. Certainly the egalitarian and distinct nature of group walking practices in many religious and secular contexts continues to be a recognized and celebrated feature (Darby 2000; Slavin 2003) for walking has a democratizing quality to it, it is cheap, available to most and has the potential to put participants in contact with the earth and its inhabitants (Solnit 2000).

Clearly there are overlaps between pilgrimage and other forms of walking practice. What seems particularly interesting about these overlaps is that both long walks and pilgrim practice reveal our preparedness to endure pain for some perceived higher goal. Both self inflicted bodily suffering and bodily suffering which is relived or cured are key features of pilgrimage in many religious contexts (Badone and Roseman 2004). In the Christian context physical suffering is sanctified through analogy to the suffering experienced by Christ on the cross. Sick pilgrims have long visited holy sites in the hope of restoration, and at Lourdes traditionally the ultimate achievement is to enable the crippled to walk⁵³.

In order to understand the rationale for pain and suffering endured by the walking pilgrim and other contemporary walkers, the researcher needs to go beyond culturally orientated explanations of pilgrimage and take into account the biological body as well (Glucklich 2001; Slavin 2003). Slavin, in his ethnography of contemporary pilgrim walkers to Santiago de Compostella identifies how the physical practice and rhythm of walking produces some very specific social and physical qualities to the pilgrim experience. Through participating as a walking pilgrim himself he is able to describe first hand the way that the pain of the previous days walking tends to dissipate as muscles warm up and the day progresses. He also shows how walking enables participants to engage in 'meditative practice' through '...concentrating on the action and rhythm of the walk' (Slavin 2003, 8). Thus, the rhythm and practice of walking allows participants to elevate themselves from the

⁵³ Interestingly in a recent ethnography of the Catholic Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust it is found that rather than sustain the hope of cure the disabled are positioned within a discourse which sanctifies physical suffering through analogy to the suffering experienced by Christ (Dahlberg 1990).

pain which tends to also be produced through long walks, while a walking ethnography allows specific embodied insights into these walking practices (a method I adopt in my own research Chapters 5-9).

Glucklich (2001) in his book 'Sacred Pain', argues that the self-inflicted pain of the pilgrim is not madness, but rather it entails a form of embodied rationality. Pain has the capacity to alter the consciousness or transform the identity of the participant; a transformation engendered through the neuro chemical production of natural opiates which are released when in pain. These opiates are thought to enable the relief of religiously coded feelings such as guilt or shame, enabling a form of spiritual and moral elevation and bringing participants closer together with god and other transcendent religious ideas such as heaven, eternity and the holy (Glucklich 2001). Glucklich, through identifying both opiates and cultural codes as variable components of the pilgrim walker's experience offers a less essentialist approach to understanding the experience of the Pilgrim than Turner's earlier anthropological explanations. Through identifying opiates released when in pain, he also begins to offer one possible physiological explanation for why, in general, walkers are prepared to endure the pain of long walks. This connection between pain and walking is particularly relevant for walkers with blindness for whom a walk is inevitably a particularly demanding and often painful experience with regular slips, trips and knocks.

Romantic Walking: elevation, opiates and rhythmic engagements

I will now move from the natural opiates released through the pain of walking practice to some romantic opium eaters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and their more secular rationales for walking. In Britain by the second half of the eighteenth century, walking was transformed from a spiritual practice or pastime of the aristocracy into a popular and respectable (at least for men) leisure pursuit of the upper middle classes. Romantic thought, transport revolutions, a growing interest in natural science, hunting and anti-hunting sentiments⁵⁴, processes of urbanization and

⁵⁴ For example, Landry suggests that 'In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, long distance walking was first popularized as an outgrowth of, and then as an alternative to, hunting and shooting' (Landry 2001, xiii).

changing socio-economic circumstances also had a role to play in the growing popularity of walking for pleasure (Harrison 1991; Wallace 1993; Landry 2001; Burchardt 2002). Romanticism – from the poetry of Wordsworth to the walking essayists of the nineteenth century – is considered to be a particularly key aspect to this growing popularity of walking for pleasure (Amato 2004, 101). As Amato writes in his history of ‘Western’ walking, ‘Romanticism changed walking...into an elevated vehicle for experiencing nature, the world and the self’ (Amato 2004, 102).

Romanticism is hard to define precisely, entailing a diversity of ideas and forms. However, key literary and artistic figures such as Wordsworth (1770-1850), Ruskin (1819-1900), Coleridge (1772-1834), Turner (1775-1851) and Constable (1776-1837) tend to be credited with the early Romanticisation of walking and the English landscape. Through their poetry, writing and painting these Romantics are thought to have increased the popularity of leisure walking practices and provided a set of ideas, vocabulary and modes of expression for walkers to convey the passion, sentiment and nostalgia felt through their encounters with nature (Andrews 1989; Wallace 1993; Jarvis 1997; Amato 2004; Dimbleby 2005). Thus, paradoxically, Romantics were involved in both the codification of nature and in the growing interest in a capacity to walk outside of conventional avenues of discourse and connect with nature beyond words (a topic discussed in Chapter 2 on the sublime). Romantics directed concerns away from Enlightenment values of order, rationality and control and toward feeling, expression and a sense of union with self and nature (Gilroy 2000). They attempted to elevate themselves from the civilizing norms of polite society and literally and metaphorically rise above the environmental, social and moral ills of the city. Their ideas were influenced by the local landscapes, stories, imaginaries, experiences and drugs available from Europe and far-flung colonies (Mitchell 1994; Fulford and Lee 2002).

Romantic figures such as Wordsworth and Coleridge still tend to be emphasised as key in contemporary histories of walking (Jarvis 1997; Solnit 2000; Amato 2004) and it is hard to determine the extent to which this is simply a self-perpetuating popular/academic discourse of ‘the men who made the Lake District’. For example, numerous women writers have been influential in the development of the Romantic movement and countryside writing in the eighteenth century, yet it is not until

recently that they have become an adequately represented dimension of the romantic movement (Labbe 1998; Gilroy 2000). While figures such as Wordsworth and Coleridge promoted a self reflexive tradition of Romantic walking outlined in Amato's (2004) and Solnit's (2000) walking histories; the uptake of this tradition as a justification for walking and mode of experience has been neither uniform nor universal (Kinsman 1995; Labbe 1998; Mills 2000, 23; Landry 2001; Tolia-Kelly 2006). Walkers, past and present, cannot be assumed to be the subject of or inspired by a unified Romantic inheritance for walkers occupy a diversity of subject positions.

While the precise origins and effects of the Romantic Movement continue to be debated, for the purposes of this chapter what is important to note is that: for the Romantics walking was not only a *subject of* thought but also a *route to* thought and to *particular styles of writing and representation*. Many 'key' Romantic figures were keen walkers, and over their lifetime they walked thousands of miles. For example, William Wordsworth was an avid walker and it has been estimated that he walked over 175,000 miles during his time in the Lakes⁵⁵ (Burchardt 2002). This walking of Wordsworth and his friend Coleridge became both a compositional tool and instrument of thought, inspiration and encounter (Wallace 1993). Through their walking they attempted to elevate themselves from the civilizing norms of middle class urban industrial life and transcend perceived limits of discourse and rationality. Hazlitt describes the different walking modes through which these poets composed:

Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained, and internal. The one might be termed more *dramatic*, the other more *lyrical*. Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copse-wood; whereas Wordsworth always wrote (if he could) walking up and down a straight gravel-walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption. (William Hazlitt, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets,' 1823, 523)

⁵⁵ In 1790 Wordsworth settled at Grasmere in the lakes and later at Rydal

For both Wordsworth and Coleridge the rhythm and modalities of walking determined features of their poetry. Footfalls beat out a rhythm for their thought and stimulated new discursive orderings of their experiences. However, it is also interesting to note from this section quoted from Hazlitt that for Wordsworth, varied landscape terrain was not a helpful element of the compositional process. It was flat gravel which aided his thought.

Wallace (1993), in her book 'Walking, Literature and English Culture', argues that the combination of walking and thinking participated in by the Romantics encouraged an emphasis on bodily and immersive forms of experience over conventional 'picturesque' views and writing styles (discussed in Chapter 2). For Wallace this 'pedestrian perspective' provided the poet and writer with an '...alternative to the increasingly unsatisfactory perception of natural scenes as discrete 'views'' (Wallace 1993, 13). Walking helped to foster an approach to writing which entails a sense of 'immersion' as an alternative to the 'disembodied view' characteristic of conventional picturesque landscape taste. This peripatetic approach to writing was adopted by other writers and artists in the nineteenth century. For example William Cowper, John Thelwall, James Plumptre, Jane Austen and John Clare are all thought to have adopted this approach to writing through walking (Jarvis 1997). However walking does not exclude the possibility of the picturesque appraisal of nature and in much romantic poetry it is possible to find a combination of peripatetic and picturesque writing forms. For example, in Wordsworth's poem 'an evening walk' (1787) the peripatetic motion is also accompanied by observations of the picturesque beauty of nature:

Far from my dearest Friend, 'tis mine to rove
Through bare grey dell, high wood, and pastoral cove;
Where Derwent rests, and listens to the roar
That stuns the tremulous cliffs of high Lodore;
Where peace to Grasmere's lonely island leads,
To willowy hedge-rows, and to emerald meads;
Leads to her bridge, rude church, and cottaged grounds,
Her rocky sheepwalks, and her woodland bounds;
Where, undisturbed by winds, Winander sleeps

'Mid clustering isles, and holly-sprinkled steeps;
Where twilight glens endear my Esthwaite's shore,
And memory of departed pleasures, more.
Fair scenes, erewhile, I taught, a happy child,
The echoes of your rocks my carols wild:
The spirit sought not then, in cherished sadness,
A cloudy substitute for failing gladness,
In youth's keen eye the livelong day was bright,
The sun at morning, and the stars at night,
Alike, when first the bittern's hollow bill
Was heard, or woodcocks roamed the moonlight hill.
In thoughtless gaiety I coursed the plain,
And hope itself was all I knew of pain;
For then, the inexperienced heart would beat
At times, while young Content forsook her seat,
And wild Impatience, pointing upward, showed,
Through passes yet unreached, a brighter road.
Alas! the idle tale of man is found
Depicted in the dial's moral round;
Hope with reflection blends her social rays
To gild the total tablet of his days;
Yet still, the sport of some malignant power,
He knows but from its shade the present hour.

These opening verses of Wordsworth's poem 'an evening walk' (1787) compel us to recognise the effects of walking on the mind of the participant; the distractions, rhythms of thought and pace of understanding that walking enables. His observations emerge from the landscape 'a high wood, and pastoral cove' and from the rhythm of the poem it is possible to imagine how it fits into the beats of his footfalls. For Wordsworth walking through and looking upon the landscape entail both reflective 'memory of departed pleasures' and 'thoughtless gaiety'. He was a poet adept at picking up poetic materials from his walks in both the country and the city – the sound of a bittern, a blind beggar, a leech gatherer, a field of flowers. This immersed, peripatetic style of writing is important for it is indicative of the range of possible

early landscape encounters that occurred in the Lake District and Peak District; encounters that were not solely to do with visual apprehension, but were also about immersion and rhythm. The relations between walking and writing found in Romantic literature also point toward a concern to ‘elevate oneself’ both literally – in the countryside; and metaphorically away from our humdrum minds and conventional modes of writing. Relations between walking and writing also point toward the ongoing tension in romantic thought between the rationality of the picturesque and the desire to escape from this increasingly conventional discourse (a topic discussed in Chapter 2).

It is likely that natural endorphins released through walking contributed to the creative development of romantic imagery and discourse, however an ‘immersive’ and ‘sensuous’ style of romantic poetry was also achieved through the use of manufactured opium. Since Hayter’s (1968) classic text ‘Opium and the English Romantic Imagination the Romantics’ encounters with ‘laudanum’ (opium dissolved in alcohol) are now a well documented phenomenon. Laudanum, a common medicine cabinet item in the eighteenth century, was used as a tranquilizer and analgesic – a product introduced through Britain’s colonies. While Wordsworth is not documented as using this substance to excess, Coleridge became a regular ‘opium eater’ and is thought to have at times presented opium as if it were ‘...a romantic key to unexplored areas of the mind’ (Fulford and Lee 2002, 118).

De Quincey a friend of Coleridge and author of ‘Confessions of an English Opium Eater’ (1822) was also a habitual user of opium. At times this drug was combined with walking as a way in which to achieve the Romantic ideal of exploring the furthest recesses of the self. Coleridge experienced ‘opium reveries’ when he first started experimenting with the drug. These reveries are described by Hayter (1968) as ‘...states of relaxed mental enjoyment in which the imagination floated freely from image to image in streamy meanders....Pain anxiety and fear had vanished, the sense of time had become elastic and new worlds could be decreed without image or concern’ (214). Most famously Coleridge created the poem ‘Kublah Kahn’ during one of these reveries. The poem was written in 1797 but unpublished for eighteen years. Through combining walking and opium they developed an opiate induced

sense of landscape romantics and stretched their sense of embodiment achieved in conjunction with the landscape.

The heavy opium use of the Romantics seems to have been confined to a few well documented cases (Hayter 1968). However, by the nineteenth century the Romantic engagement with nature through walking had become somewhat of an institution and Romantic thought and literature was gaining popularity. Solnit (2000) describes how in the nineteenth century walking as a 'devout act' was equivalent to visiting church and goes so far as to suggest of walking that 'Sadly it had become as pious, sexless, and moral a religion as the Christianity it propped up or supplanted' (119). What inspires Solnit's comment is a generation of walking essayists such as Hazlitt, Keats, De Quincey, Thoreau and Robert Louis Stevenson who, in the shadow of previous Romantics, not only celebrated the freedom and potentially egalitarian nature of walking, but also paradoxically delimited that freedom, through the provision of prescriptive guidelines on precisely how and with whom we should walk. For example, Hazlitt, in his famous walking essay 'On going a journey', writes;

I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country I wish to vegetate like the country....I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it....The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do, just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others. (Hazlitt 1822)

While Hazlitt's essay celebrates the potential for walking to be an escape from polite society and the norms of urban life, the paradox is that such writing appears to delimit the very freedom that walking is thought to promote, often advocating the self-conscious uptake of walking practice and a self-reflexive subject position. However, urban walking practices show how the movement of the walking body continues to present possibilities for reinvention and elevation from perceived limitations of urban architecture, capitalist commodity relations, social norms and discursive traditions. So it is to the urban walking body that this review will now turn.

Urban walking: political engagements and elevations

While Romantic walks in the countryside maybe considered subversive, the transgressive nature of walking practice tends to be most commonly associated with urban space. Attending to some ways in which urban walking has been thought about and performed can help us to re-imagine the potentials of the walking body and think through its possible theorization in rural and urban space.

In Europe, particularly France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century different styles and practices of walking in the city have at times been crucial components of broader aesthetic, political and philosophical movements. Such traditions of European urban walking include: the nineteenth century 'Flaneur' (a disinterested observer of the urban scene); the Dadist 'event' (which grew out of a disaffection with Western culture after the first world war); the Surrealists 'deambulations' (walks in the city which emphasized a loss of conscious control and submission to risk and chance); and the Situationist 'derives' (Basset 2004). Controversy still exists over the precise distinctions between these different styles and philosophies of walking practice, for example between Walter Benjamin's Flaneur and other Situationist forms of walking practice (Keith 2005, 104). However what is important to note here is the way such walking traditions point toward recognized potentials of the walking body.

For the Situationists walking enabled a form of autonomy, self realization and self expression denied by capitalist commodity relations (Jacobs 2000). Key tactics of the Situationists included the 'derive' (or drift) – an individual or group passage through the city paying close attention to ambience; subversive use of materials that were part of the 'society of the spectacle' (a phenomenon identified by Debord) and the construction of 'situations' which promoted the tendency toward play in every day life. The Situationists' critical attitude toward the perceived hegemonic reach of modernity is thought to distinguish their work from the Flaneur's voyeuristic gaze or the Surrealists concern with the strange for its own sake (Basset 2004).

There are both continuities and tensions to be found between De Certeau's (1984) essay 'Walking in the City' and the Situationists work on walking. De Certeau may be understood to build upon the Situationists insights into the potentially subversive

nature of walking practices and provides an extensive conceptual discussion of walking (Morris, 2000). His essay reveals how the practice of walking constitutes the city, describing how walkers select and fragment the space traversed, so that while certain spaces are condemned to inertia through walker choices, others are magnified by the recall of certain features, events, sonic or olfactory presences. In this way De Certeau shows how walking in the city gives shape to space for the magnification of certain sites through memory, and practice makes them more significant than their spatial geometry might imply. It is a topology of walked space which relates to, but is not the equivalent of, the cities topography. This parallels arguments made about the space of landscape in Chapter 2 where I have suggested that walking practices open up particular spaces of landscape.

De Certeau's work is an important contribution to non-geometrical interpretations of space. It shares parallels with Lefebvre's concept of 'lived space' (Lefebvre 1991) and flags up the way in which movement, memory and sensations other than sight contribute to the experience of the city landscape. However De Certeau's interpretation of walking in the city also has certain limitations. Firstly, De Certeau's work and other work has highlighted the freedom and individuality that walking can afford, however, while an individual's walking acts maybe labelled 'resistant' or 'radical' these do not necessarily equate into effective social and political power which stretches beyond the individual (this is an issue which ultimately comes under scrutiny in this thesis in Chapter 10). Secondly, De Certeau's interpretation of walking entails the twin elements 'strategies' that entail discipline and regimentation and 'tactics' which involve forms of resistance-seizing opportunities and encountering unpredictable moments of walking practice. Unfortunately by imposing these two categories on walking practice De Certeau delimits possible analyses and overlooks the ways in which seemingly 'resistant' forces are also potentially implicated in disciplining walker movements (Morris 2004). Thus while De Certeau, following similar lines to those interested in the 'Flaneur', demonstrates how walking *can* be resistant it must be borne in mind that *walking acts are not intrinsically resistant* - varying according to the participant and their motives. Pile (1996) usefully illustrates this point by showing how De Certeau cannot account for practices such as patrols of police or picking up the children from school (Pile 1996, 228).

We cannot simply understand the walking body as a consistently subversive force. Maus's (1979) work on body techniques adds further weight to this important point. For Maus walking is a habitual practice organized and transmitted through different forms of social authority, the body is inscribed and bodily dispositions are created through training, discipline and mimicry. Through describing the specifics of walking movement Maus renders the habitual practice of walking strange and illustrates (albeit in out dated and seemingly prejudiced terms) its cultural specificity. For example, he writes:

The habitus of the body being upright while walking, breathing, rhythm of the walk, swinging the fists, the elbows, progression with the trunk in advance of the body or by advancing either side of the body alternately (we have got accustomed to moving all the body forward at once). Feet turned in or out. Extension of the leg. We laugh at the 'goose-step'. It is the way the German army can obtain maximum extension of the leg, given in particular that all Northerners, high on their leg, like to take as long steps as possible....Here is one of those idiosyncrasies which are simultaneously a matter of race, individual mentality and collective mentality.
(Mauss 1979, 114-115)

For Maus walking becomes a sort of unconscious cultural inheritance learnt through mimicry and a simultaneously biological and cultural phenomenon. His analysis of walking practice has inspired and shares similarities with subsequent non-representational writing on walking. For example, Thrift utilises this idea of an embodied unconscious cultural inheritance, to argue that contemporary body practices such as Yoga now effect how 'we' walk and how 'we' apprehend nature. However, to think through walker movements we must think through how the body always performs in conjunction with its environment. Urban Sociologist Micheal Keith argues that rather than think of the city landscape as a container for walker movement we must think through how 'the corporeal walker through urban space is always rhizomatically linked to the streets' (Keith 2005, 105). That is to say that streets, like other landscapes, are a constitutive feature of the walker. This argument about the walker in the city street parallels arguments made in Chapter 2 about

landscape, where the rural landscape is also understood to be implicated in reciprocal ‘becomings’ of the walker. Thus like Keith we may think of the rural walker as ‘rhizomatically’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) linked to landscape.

In sum, what we can take from this brief excursion into some thoughts on urban walking practice are three key aspects of a walker that must be borne in mind in any analysis of walking practice. Firstly a walker, through their individual walking practice, has some potential capacity for subversion of both ‘conventional discourse’ and ‘conventional’ uses of space. How this capacity might be realized and the perceived usefulness of this capacity clearly depends on the specific context and the politics of the walker (and the person analyzing the walker). Secondly, a walker must be understood to be the site of culturally ingrained, unconscious embodied dispositions that are reproduced, remade and spread to others through their walking practices (in Chapter 6 we see how the unconscious practice of walking comes to light and must be re-learned for someone who has lost their sight). Thirdly, walkers must be understood as emerging in reciprocal ‘becomings’ with their past and present environments through processes of co-construction, relationality and interconnection. This means that for city dwellers urban walking practices are likely to effect how walking is performed in rural environments. I will now turn to some further histories of walking and the walker’s body in order to think through the potential ‘body-spaces’ that the walker with blindness might occupy.

Rural walking: moral elevation and political transgressions

While it is urban walking which tends to be most commonly associated with political and subversive acts, that is not to say that walking in rural space is solely a de-politicized ‘escape’ or an inherently socially conservative phenomenon, hermetically sealed off from urban politics and practice. In the nineteenth century the accelerating enclosure of agricultural land meant that rural walking practices were increasingly used as a tool for the re-appropriation of common land. In fact walking became an antithesis of owning (McCracken 1985; Wallace 1993; Jarvis 1997) and Wordsworth himself justified some of his extensive walking under the principle of subverting private claims to enclosed land (Wallace 1993). By the late nineteenth century growing working class leisure participation meant that walking provided an arena

through which egalitarian, democratic and socialist ideals could be discussed and passed on. A collection of clubs and organizations for walking, cycling and camping grew up around the socialist publication the 'Clarion' newspaper started in 1891 by Robert Blatchford⁵⁶. These clubs promoted comradeship and companionship – a sort of 'sociable socialism' where a balance attempted to be forged between a comradely and entertaining atmosphere and more serious political discussion and activity (Barton 2005, 145-146).

By 1900 the Sheffield Branch of the Clarion Ramblers founded by GBH Ward started regular weekend rambles and was one of many rambling clubs to spring up at the turn of the twentieth century (Sissons 2002). Songs and poems fuelled the passions of some of these urban ramblers. For example The young Communist Ewan MacColl wrote in a popular folk song:

I'm a Rambler, I'm a Rambler from Manchester way
I get all my pleasure the hard, moorland way
I may be a wage slave on Monday
But I am a free man on Sunday
(Rothman 1982, 9 also cited in Matless 1995, 99)

A range of other working class organizations were also involved in supporting travel and adventure for 'the masses': this included the Holiday Fellowship, the Workers Travel Association and the Co-operative holiday association (CHA). The CHA, founded in 1891, aimed to provide affordable holidays through the purchase or renting of houses for guests. The CHA then secured helpers to promote the interests of 'rational recreation' where emphasis was placed on morally beneficial leisure, loyalty and discipline – where the working class were discouraged from excessive drinking and gambling in favour of saving for holidays (Barton 2005, 143-145). By the early twentieth century a host of walking groups existed ranging from 'bolshie' working men's groups who marched to urban folk song, to the less militant open air leisure offered by the YHA, to a sort of cultured elite of walkers who were keen to follow in the footsteps of the Romantics (Matless 1995). By the inter-war period of

⁵⁶ Blatchford also wrote the most popular and significant introduction to Socialism 'Merrie England' Bonnet, A.(forthcoming).

the twentieth century many rambling groups were also bound up in a pursuit for the 'art of right living' which promoted the virtues of 'hard exercise', 'spartan living' and 'discipline' for the health of the nation (Matless 1995). Here walking came to be associated with freedom from conformity and egalitarianism and an escape from the drudgery of working class life, however, it also entailed the development of new disciplinary forms, delineating the body and mind of the citizen.

In the nineteenth century growing numbers of middle class and urban industrial working classes chose to spend their spare time walking in the countryside. However, an increasing number of rights of way were being closed off due to enclosure and the expansion of private property. In 1815 an act was passed in Parliament which allowed magistrates to close paths deemed unnecessary and in 1824 the Association for the Protection of Ancient Footpaths was formed; thus a fight for access began. This fight for access most famously came to a head in the Kinder Scout trespasses. Kinder Scout, the highest point in the Peak District was public land until 1836; however, the Enclosure Act gave it into private ownership of adjacent land holders. By the end of the nineteenth century ramblers clubs had begun to take direct action by defiantly walking across its pathway at the base and attempting to assert the principle of walking freely on the moors which were closed by a few privileged owners for the purposes of shooting (Rothman 1982). However, private land such as that on Kinder became guarded by gamekeepers with sticks and group. This meant walking on Kinder became a matter not only of sociability but of safety (Solnit 2000, 165). Members of the Communist British Workers' Sports Federation organized the most famous trespass on Kinder in 1932. The trespass resulted in a violent clash between walkers, gamekeepers and police and led to a number of arrests and five imprisonments (Guardian Newspaper 1932).

The trespass became a defining, almost mythical moment for many rambling groups and the story was passed down through songs and poems. A poem written by Sheffield Clarion Rambler Jack Jordan recalls the trespass,

On a far-of autumn evening
In the rays of the setting sun
We sat and talked of Kinder

And planned for the days to come.
Bert was a man of vision
His thoughts on the hills afar
As we pledged ourselves to the Clarion
And hitched our faith to a star
There were those who called us dreamers
But dreams can all come true
If you have faith and work for them
And ignore the scorn of the few.
Today you roam o'er Kinder
On paths that are yours by right
But don't forget in your roaming
For those paths WE had to fight
Yes, Kinder and many another
That today you regard as your own
Were kept and labelled 'Private'
Till the Clarion came to roam!
So as you plan for the future
And the way seems bright and clear
Remember the flag-unfurlers
And all that we held most dear!
(Jack Jordan 1958, cited in Sissons 2002)

Such songs and poems valued the hard work of walking and engendered a sense of collective history and morality amongst walking group members. Jordan's poem celebrates the achievements of those who fought for access to Kinder and fighting for access to Kinder has now become incorporated into a collective ramblers' myth. In subsequent chapter I use photos of Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group at the top of Kinder Scout. The story of Kinder makes these pictures doubly meaningful for many participants it symbolizes the fight for access to the countryside for all. However, it is interesting to note that while Kinder is now incorporated into popular rambler myth it was actually a minority of young militant ramblers who participated in the original Kinder trespass. Many 'respectable', more socially conservative

rambling groups kept a distance from these militants and advocated less antagonistic modes of gaining the co-operation of landowners (Rothman 1982).

Conclusions

Writing on walking reveals some of the ways in which this practice is motivated by a complex mix of corporeal and mental stimuli which may arise as much from the body and its internal states as it does from visible features of the external environment. Like writing on landscape, reflections on walking show how this practice entails a strange mix of both subversive and conservative qualities. In this chapter, I have explored some of these diverse characteristics of walking through historical examples drawn from rural, urban, athletic, religious and romantic contexts. In so doing I have shown how walking opens up particular spaces of body-landscape. For walking entails the endorphin induced highs of exercise and enables us to achieve a sense of freedom and autonomy (however illusory that sense might in fact be).

I have argued that three key aspects of a walker that must be borne in mind in any analysis of walking practice. First, a walker must be understood to have the potential to subvert conventional practice and conventional avenues of discourse (an insight I take up in my research strategy of talking while walking outlined in Chapter 5). Second, a walker is the site of culturally ingrained yet unconscious embodied dispositions, thus the walker bridges the divide between 'structure-agency' dualisms. Third, a walker's experience must be understood as existing in reciprocal 'becomings' with the landscape. These potentials of the walker have been important to bare in mind when thinking through in the experiences of members of blind and visually impaired walking groups. In the next chapter I begin to turn my attention to the specificities of blind experience and the potentials of blind testimony about their experiences. What might be said of and by the blind walker?

Chapter 4 – Representations of blindness and the use of blind testimony

Synopsis

This chapter reviews some representations of blind experience and establishes a critical context for the reading and deployment of blind interview and autobiographical testimony. Since antiquity hypothetical and actual experiences of blindness have been variously represented and discussed by philosophers interested in the relations between sensory experience and language. Blindness has been represented as a form of ignorance or punishment in opposition to the prioritization of sight and light in Western thought; it has also been represented as enabling forms of insight. In the twentieth century people with blindness have increasingly gone about representing themselves in this debate responding to longstanding negative stereotypes of blindness. This chapter discusses the extent to which blind sensory experience can be considered ‘unique’ or ‘distinct’ from the sighted. I draw upon neuro-scientific evidence which points toward the unique nature of blind sensation. However, I argue that we cannot simply defer to such science for it takes no account of cultural meanings and specific embodied practices. I, therefore, proceed to discuss the potential to express the experience of blindness to sighted others and through a predominantly sighted discourse.

Introduction

Can the blind person...ever enjoy an experience comparable to that of the sighted, of being placed in something like a landscape that can be taken in as a totality, with its infinitely variegated surfaces, contours and textures, inhabited by animals and plants, and littered with objects both natural and artificial? There is one circumstance in which this is possible, in Hull's experience, namely when it is raining....' Rain Hull writes, '...has a way of bringing out the contours of everything; it throws a coloured blanket over previously invisible things; instead of an intermittent and thus fragmented world, the steadily falling rain creates a continuity of acoustic experience....This is an experience of great beauty.' (1997: 26-27)...Rain

does for the blind what sunshine does for the sighted, bathing the world in sound as the sun bathes it in light.

(Ingold 2000, 271)

One of the initial inspirations for researching people with blindness was the idea that first hand accounts from these people could potentially reveal a ‘landscape of blind experience’ and offset other more ‘ablist’ or ‘ocular-centric’ conceptions of landscape. Crucial to the development stage of this research idea was anthropologist Ingold’s work on landscape as a form of dwelling, his use (and my own subsequent reading of) Professor Hull’s autobiographical account of blindness and other social scientists use of blind testimony (Hill 1985; Rodaway 1994; Hetherington 2000; Hetherington 2002; Hetherington 2003; Candlin 2004; Paterson 2005). However, it is important to critically reflect on the use of such blind autobiographical and interview testimony as evidence about the nature of sensory experience.

Blind testimony *about sensory experience* cannot necessarily be taken at ‘face value’ and it is extremely important to establish a critical context through which such testimony can be interpreted. This chapter argues that histories of people with blindness being treated as either ignorant or as though they have some form of extra-special insight (Barasch 2001), alongside a form of contemporary disability politics which prioritizes the individual voice – a voice which disability activists have fought hard for (Parr and Butler 1999), are factors which have the potential to both enable and impinge upon present day blind testimony and its interpretation. While sighted discourse and certain ‘scopic regimes’(Jay 1994) of knowledge based on the distancing and objectifying properties of sight may make it particularly difficult to convey the distinct nature of blind sensory experience (and may even fold back to structure that very experience). Thus while I do not wish to devalue or detract entirely from the potential ‘truth value’ of blind people talking about their sensory experiences – a strategy to be used myself in subsequent chapters! – it is also important to acknowledge the representational and discursive contexts in which such statements can be made and the particular difficulties involved in articulating the potentially unique nature of blind experience through collective sighted language.

Blindness as punishment

Who is there who would not wish to lose the senses of hearing, smell and touch, before losing sight? For he who loses his sight is like one expelled from the world, when he does not see it any more, nor anything in it. And such a life is a sister to death. (Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) *Treatise on painting*, cited in Barasch 2001, 115)

The persistent connections in Western European thought of sight with knowledge and light with Enlightenment and spirituality means that numerous representations of blindness portray the condition in primarily negative terms⁵⁷; resting on a binary logic that if sight and light equate to knowledge blindness by necessity must result in a lack of knowledge. Blind faith, blind rage, blind stupor, blind alley, blind leading the blind, blind submission and blind devotion are amongst dozens of similes and metaphors that connect blindness with ignorance, darkness, confusion and ineptitude (Kleege 1998). Such negative connotations of blindness are also traceable beyond the Enlightenment to ancient Greek and Latin myths and early Christian teachings. While it is impossible to determine the extent to which such Western representations of blindness pervade contemporary British imaginaries, and we cannot assume a uniform inheritance of Western representations of blindness, it is likely that they contribute something toward many people's expectations and experiences of blindness⁵⁸ and to the subsequent Anglo-American autobiographical representations of blindness that I will discuss here.

Perhaps one of the most famous early representations of blindness occurs in the Greek play 'Oedipus Rex' when Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother, then gouges out his own eyes as a form of punishment. In Greek myths characters such as

⁵⁷ This review is particularly indebted to the research of historian Barasch and his book 'Blindness: The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought' (2001) for this text traces the history of European representations of blindness and the moral and religious connotations that blindness carried back to the Biblical and Greco-Roman representations of antiquity. However, as a whole, this chapter differs from his account in a number of important ways, for while his book remains primarily focused on pre-nineteenth century imagery, I trace the representations of blindness into the present day and link the historical portrayal of blindness to the philosophy of embodied experience and contemporary blind testimony.

⁵⁸ Given more time it would also have been interesting and worthwhile to explore non-Western representations of blind experience.

Oedipus, Polyphemus, the seer Tiresias and Polymester are united by the fact that their blindness is portrayed as their own fault – an essential part of the divine workings of fate (Barasch 2001, 23-25). This idea of blindness as punishment can also be found in early Christian discourse. For example in the Old Testament, the removal of eyesight figures in the threatened punishments for disobedience of the Lord's commandments (Leviticus 26:16) while in the Laws given to Moses blindness excludes men from the priesthood (Leviticus 22:22). In the New Testament stories of Jesus healing the blind are evidence of Christ's supernatural powers - his miracle cures lift blind men from their supposed ignorance, performing a metaphoric equivalence between seeing and faith, sight and knowledge. This idea of seeing and faith is also reproduced in the painting by Breugel 'Parable of the Blind' (figure 4.1). The painting illustrates the biblical line of Christ '...and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into a ditch', and while the painting yields a variety of interpretations it would seem to use blindness as a metaphor for ignorance and confusion reinforcing the idea that both blind and sighted are in need of the guiding sight and light of Christ.



Figure 4.1 Breugel, “Parable of the Blind”, also known as “The Blind Leading the Blind” (1568; Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples)

Negative representations of blindness as ignorance or punishment were influenced by both metaphoric understandings of blindness and actual encounters with blind people. In the Middle Ages the half blind figure of the antichrist is thought to have

reinforced depictions of blindness as a negative and immoral state, while the low class secular blind beggar of the period tended to be represented as devious and fraudulent (Barasch 2001, 78). The beautiful body was equated with the good, while the ugly, disabled and deformed were connected to the morally evil. This connection persists today, reinforced through contemporary celebrity culture. Contemporary representations of blindness in Anglo-American literature and film which do exist are found to further reinforce negative connotations of blindness. For example, visually impaired academic Kleege (1998) reviews such representations and argues that there continues to be a tendency to represent ‘...blindness as a process which inverts, perverts or thwarts human relationships.’(71)

By the early twentieth century vision, thought and experience were increasingly connected in the popular Western imagination through the development of optical devices like the camera obscura and the stereoscope in the eighteenth century (Crary 1992) and further developments in visual technology such as mass produced photography in the early twentieth century (Mirzoeff 1999). Interestingly such developments were also accompanied by a growing distrust in vision amongst artists and philosophers, for such technology also revealed the potentially illusory nature of vision. Keen to reflect on vision’s hegemonic role philosopher Merleau-Ponty became interested in the insights of the blind (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Jay 1994). While Picasso is thought to have credited his blind subjects with a spiritual inner vision and ‘...chose a style that deemphasizes objective sight in favour of a deeper vision’ (Ravin and Perkins 2004). Such representations relate to an alternative set of discourses on blind experience which credit the blind subject with a form of insight.

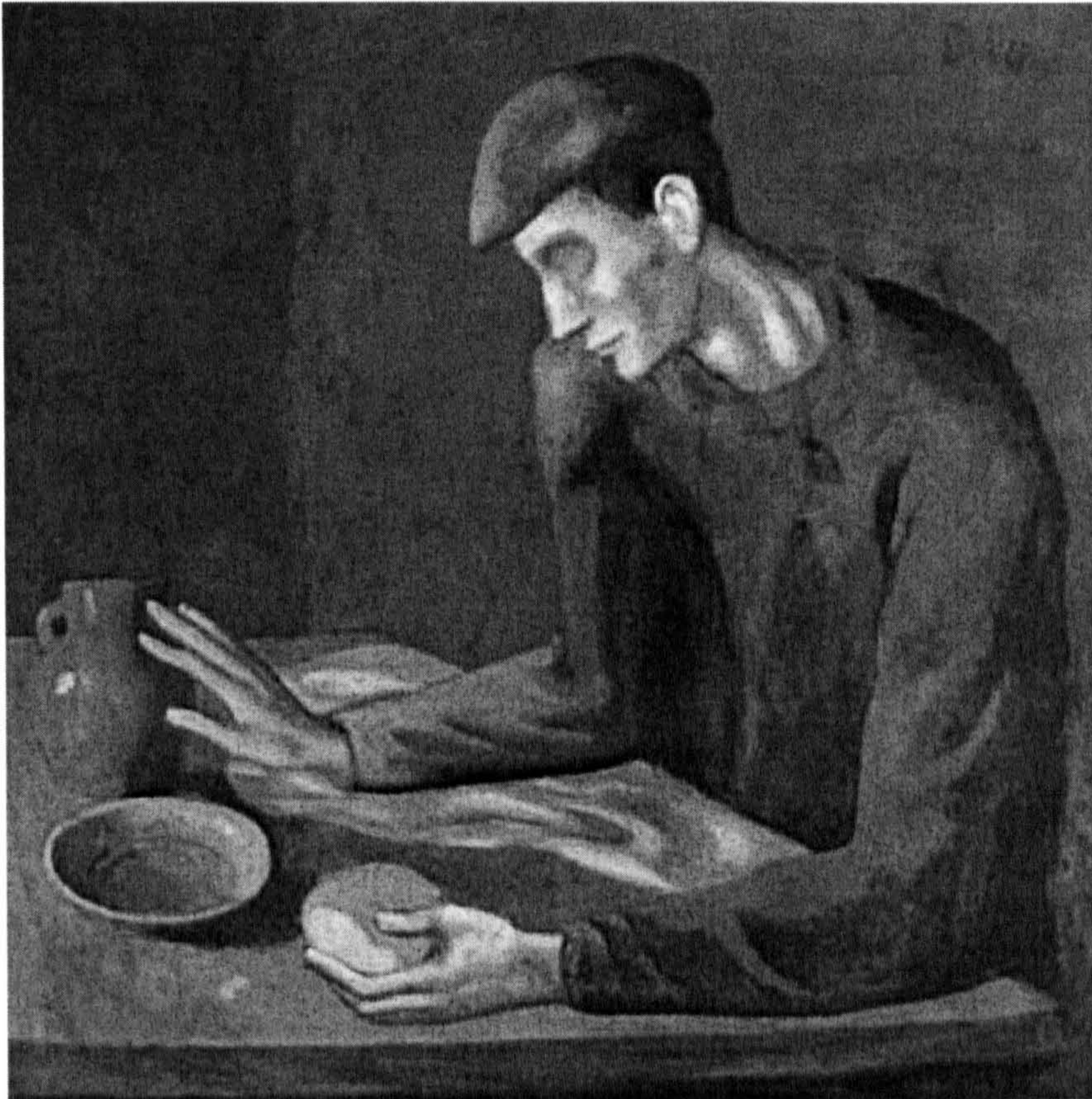


Figure 4.2. Pablo Picasso, *The Blind Man's Meal*, 1903, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Blindness as a form of insight

The ocular-centrism of Western thought and the prioritization of sight and light in Christianity mean that blindness has often been portrayed as a negative condition, form of punishment or representative of ignorance. However any such prioritization of vision has, since antiquity, also been accompanied by a degree of healthy scepticism regarding vision's hegemonic role in Western thought and an acknowledgement of vision's potentially deceptive properties (Crary 1992; Jay 1994; Mirzoeff 1999). At times this has led to a faith in the more tangible properties of touch and stretched into an argument that blind people are capable of more authentic insight than those who are blind for they remain un-distracted by vision. For example, geographer Hill cites the French writer Jacques Lusseyran to endorse this view suggesting that the blind occupy a world '...free of the deception of physical appearances, where what and how something is said reveals its true purpose' (cited in Hill 1985,109).

Blind people have often been credited with a form of insight, with an ability to see beyond the present human condition and even communicate with the supernatural world (Barasch 2001). Such attitudes to blindness as a form of insight have a historical lineage which can be traced back to Greek myths and early Christian discourse. For example, in antiquity the blind 'seer' is often depicted as having a form of 'inner vision'. While the poet Homer (himself blind) creates the character 'Tiresias' who is blinded as a form of punishment, but then develops compensatory abilities as a prophet. In the Renaissance it is thought that ideas of blindness '...oscillated between a low class beggar, often associated with deception, sin and guilt, and a mythical seer endowed with supernatural gifts' (Barasch 2001, 140). While early Christian writing utilises ideas of temporary blindness to indicate a moment of insight, revelation or supernatural vision (this can be found in Paul's conversion in the acts of the Apostles) and in literature of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries it is found that conditions such as clouds or darkness which obscure vision are pre-conditions for true contemplation, allowing the gaze to be directed inward to the inner soul (Barasch 2001, 29).

The Romantics perpetuated this fascination with blindness (Paulson 1987); blind harpists accompanied the ultimate sublime adventurers (Schama, 1995). While in book seven of Wordsworth's autobiographical work *The Prelude* a blind beggar arises suddenly from the confusion of the London landscape – representing a moment of stillness which is thought to force the poet to confront the limits of linguistic determination (Friedman 1989):

How oft, amid those overflowing streets have I gone forward with the crowd,
and said unto myself, 'The face of every one that passes by me is a mystery!'
Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed; By thoughts of what and
whither, when and how, until the shapes before my eyes became a second-
sight procession, such as glides over still mountains, or appears in dreams;
And once, far-travelled in such mood, beyond the reach of common
indication, lost amid the moving pageant, I was smitten abruptly, with the
view (a sight not rare) of a blind beggar, who, with upright face, stood,
propped against a wall, upon his chest; Wearing a written paper, to explain
his story, whence he came, and who he was. Caught by the spectacle my

mind turned round as with the might of waters; an apt type this label seemed of the utmost we can know, both of ourselves and of the universe; And, on the shape of that unmoving man, His steadfast face and sightless eyes, I gazed, as if admonished from another world. Though reared upon the base of outward things, structures like these the excited spirit mainly builds for herself; scenes different there are, full-formed, that take, with small internal help, Possession of the faculties the peace that comes with night; the deep solemnity of nature's intermediate hours of rest, When the great tide of human life stands still; The business of the day to come, unborn, of that gone by, locked up, as in the grave.

(Wordsworth, 1850)

Wordsworth's writes, 'this label seemed of the utmost we can know, Both of ourselves and of the universe'. In fact, it seems that his encounter with blindness results in him reflecting on the differences between text and context; and between language and embodied experience, pre-empting some of my own interests in blindness.

Blindness as enabling philosophical reflection on sensory experience

While writers reflected on the insights of blindness from a Romantic, literary point of view, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, an effective surgical technique was developed in France for the removal of cataracts, and with the development of this surgical cure, blindness started to become a phenomenon which was accessible to science and open to rational inquiry (Paulson 1987). In England and France there became a growing interest in the philosophical problems of blindness, and Enlightenment philosophers engaged with incidents of the blind restored to sight in order to elucidate relations between vision, touch, language and thought (Morgan 1977). The study of blindness became a way in which to study the nature of the senses. However for the majority of Enlightenment philosophers, blindness was only of interest as a mode through which to produce a mythical moment of 'first sight'. Despite this it remains instructive and interesting to re-visit the Enlightenment debates on blindness in order to understand the previous positions which blindness has come to occupy in philosophical thought via the 'Molyneux Problem' and in particular to learn from the insights of Denis Diderot who challenged the foundations

of the 'Molyneux problem' through conducting an early empirical enquiry into the actual experience of blindness.

The idea of the man born blind restored to sight was most famously articulated by Locke in a question posed to him by William Molyneux. It is considered to be was one of the two great 'mythical experiences' upon which eighteenth century thought was based (the other being the foreign spectator in an unknown country) (Jay 1994). The key question that Enlightenment philosophers were concerned with was; what would blind people see if their vision was restored? The debate which swirled around this question attracted attention from every major figure of the French Enlightenment and was used to address whether ideas and concepts are innate or given through the senses (Paulson 1987). These debates surrounding the restoration of sight come to the fore through the attention of John Locke in the second edition of his 'Essay concerning Human Understanding' (1694). In this book he brought attention to the famous 'Molyneux Question'— a question posed in 1690 by Locke's friend William Molyneux (1656-1698), a Dublin lawyer whose wife had lost her sight in the first year of their marriage. Locke inserted the question into his own discussion of perception:

Will a person born without sight, who has acquired knowledge of the world through other senses such as touch, be immediately able to distinguish objects if, by some miracle or successful operation, he regains his ability to see? Will he be able to tell the difference by sight alone between a sphere and a cube, whose shapes he knows only through his fingers? Put more generally, does the mind know before sense experience and if not, does each sense contribute a separate knowledge, which then has somehow to be co-ordinated into a unified sense of the world? Or perhaps even more fundamentally, is there intuitive knowledge prior to discursively constructed concepts, which are synthetic acts of understanding based on experience?

(Molyneux's Question, cited in Jay 1994, 98)

Locke's response to this question was based on his broader argument that the mind's ideas are not innate, that they do not have a divine ideal, but rather arrive from sensory experience with the world. Thus, the blind man could not name a cube or

sphere on sight for he does not immediately know how to associate the experience of vision with his previous tactile experience. In this way Locke simply conceptualized blindness as a lack of vision which required a cure. However, in 1749, Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot (1713-1784) criticized Locke's abstract theoretical speculation on this matter (Adams 1999). Diderot sought the empirical testimony of blind people, stretching philosophical understandings of blindness beyond simply a lack of sight, illustrating instead the potential alternate sensory orientations and cultures of thought evident amongst those who are blind.

In his *'lettre sur les aveugles'* (letter on the blind) Diderot (1749) confronts the universalizing discourse about the mind and the senses which made the Molyneux problem possible in the first place. He argues that the gaze cannot necessarily be taken as the origin of ideas (Jay 1994) and shows instead that our intellectual ideas and beliefs are to a large degree dependant on the state of our senses⁵⁹. Writing both critically and satirically, Diderot notes that if a society consisted of five persons each having only one sense it would be amusing because each person would have a world view based on the sense he possessed and look upon his companions as senseless. He proceeds to show through his conversations with the blind man of Puisaux how touch might constitute a partial substitute for sight. For example, when asked if he would like to have eyes, the blind man of Puisaux is thought to have replied,

If it were not for curiosity I would just as soon have long arms: It seems to me that my hands would tell me more of what goes on in the moon than your eyes or your telescopes; and besides, eyes cease to see sooner than hands to touch. I would be as well off if I perfected the organ I possess, as if I obtained the organ which I am deprived of. (Diderot 1999, 134)

Thus, Diderot begins to show how the gaze is not necessarily the origin of ideas and how blindness may give rise to ways of perceiving and knowing which are qualitatively different from those of the sighted, emphasising the role of touch and the immersion of the viewer in the materiality of the world in ways which pre-

⁵⁹ Diderot proposes that '...the state of our organs and our senses has a great influence on our metaphysics and our morality and that those ideas which seem purely intellectual are closely dependant on the confirmation of our bodies...' (Diderot 1999, 134).

empted much later phenomenological interpretations of experience (Merleau-Ponty 2004). He continues to describe how:

The blind man of Puisaux judges his proximity to the fire by the degrees of heat; of the fullness of vessels by the sound made by liquids which he pours into them; of the proximity of bodies by the action of the air on his face. He is so sensitive to the least atmospheric change that he can distinguish between a street and a closed alley
(Diderot 1999, 134).

Diderot was also keen to emphasise the role of language in the articulation of ideas. While he acknowledges that ‘the blind’ may miss certain kinds of sensory information from the outside world because that information is not accessible through touch or other non-visual senses, he argues that a blind man learns visual concepts in a similar way to how sighted people learn words which do not refer to a direct sensory experience – that is through relational forms of thought and propositional modes of knowledge. For example, writing from the conversations he had with the blind man of Puisaux, Diderot suggests that ‘...in saying ‘that is beautiful’ he does not form an opinion, it is no more than repeating the judgement of those who can see; and is not this the case of three quarters of those who give their opinion on a play or a book ?’(Diderot 1999, 150).

Thus, Diderot proceeds to show us the ways in which the understandings of blind people are often articulated through systems of signification and opinion developed by a predominantly sighted world, pre-empting much later theories of the inter-subjective nature of language (see also Gooden 2001, 8-9). In so doing he calls into question the very possibility of the revelatory moment of the blind man restored to sight found in the Molyneux problem by showing us that the articulation of ideas is not an innate skill or solely derived from sensory experience. Instead he points toward an inter-subjective rather than individual reality. Diderot therefore challenges two key assumptions of the Molyneux problem; that the blind man has no prior understanding of the visible and that the articulation of ideas has an entirely experiential origin.

Diderot's work is important to this thesis because, firstly, he reveals the value of empirical testimony of people with blindness to inform debate about the representation and articulation of sensory experience. Secondly, he begins to show how blindness may give rise to alternative ways of perceiving through senses other than vision. Thirdly, he draws specific attention to the fact that blind testimony about their experience remains immersed in language and systems of signification developed by a predominantly sighted world. These three insights raise research issues which will be explored further here through recourse to contemporary blind autobiography, some insights from neuroscience into the unique nature of blind sensation and some philosophical reflections on the relations between language and embodied experience.

Self representations of blindness: the unique nature of sensory experience and its linguistic expression

Since Diderot's early interviews with the blind man of Puisaux improvements in the education and social status of blind people (Illingworth 1910) have meant that in the twentieth century people with blindness increasingly represented themselves within debates on disabled experience. This includes a number of autobiographies of blindness which seem to aim to offset negative representations of blindness as ignorance and draw attention to the significance of the tactile, kinaesthetic and aural senses for a person who is blind (Keller 1911; Hull 1990; Kleege 1998; Michalko 1999; Kuusisto 2002). Such representations counter the idea that blindness is simply a lack of sight and draw attention to how blindness gives rise to unique ways of directing and attuning to sensory experience. Such auto-biographies form part of a genre of disabled writing of personal bodily experiences (French 1992; Butler and Bowlby 1997; Thomas 1999). Where, for example, French argues 'When people deny our disabilities they deny who we really are' (French 1992, 76).

Blind theology Professor Hull's autobiography of blindness 'Touching the Rock' is one such autobiographical account of blindness and it has been used by anthropologist Ingold (2000) in his account of landscape as a form of dwelling, by Paterson (2005) in his phenomenologically inspired research on touch and by Rodaway (1994) in his book 'Sensuous Geographies'. In his book, Hull documents

three years of his life after losing his sight; he describes how, in the years after his loss of sight he experienced a gradual reduction in his visual memory. This included not only a loss of visual images and memories but also the very idea of seeing. He suggests even the concept of objects having visible characteristics was difficult to grasp – a state he refers to as ‘deep blindness’. His autobiography describes how he uses a sense of bodily touch on his journey home from work which entails not only the skin surface, but also the tactile-muscular and tactile-kinaesthetic senses:

When I try to visualise my route, what I do is anticipate the sensations which my body will have at various times (i.e. places) along that route...What lies more than two or three feet away on, either side of that trail means nothing to me. It is not part of my experience, except when it comes home to me in traffic noise or bird song. My place is known to me by the soles of my feet and by the tip of my cane.

(Hull 1990, 104)

Hull combats a conceptualization of blindness as simply an impairment or lack, revealing how blindness may also contribute to a particular mental state, culture or way of seeing the world. For Hull (2001) ‘...blindness is something which creates its own worlds’ (23). His work echoes many other twentieth century autobiographical representations of sight loss and blindness which insist that blindness in some way creates its own world or way of knowing distinct from those who are sighted. For example, blind sociologist Rod Michalko also writes ‘blindness is not simply the negation of sight: It is a way of sensing the world and a way of being in the world...’ (1999,107).

Such autobiographical accounts of blind experience have been appealing to academics interested in perception and embodiment, for they seem to provide contemporary ‘confirmation’ of the imbrication of the viewer in the materiality of the world, a theme found in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and his specific example of the blind man’s use of a cane (Merleau Ponty 1962, 143). However, Hull’s book cannot simply be read as evidence about the nature of blind sensory experience, in fact, to interpret it in this way risks perpetuating historical stereotypes of the ‘blind seer’ as endowed with some form of mythical insight into the nature of sensory

experience. Rather, Hull's work and the secondary use of Hull's text by researchers such as Ingold (2000) and Rodaway (1993) requires us to confront two important questions surrounding blind testimony: to what extent might we understand blindness as a unique form of sensory experience? And to what extent is it possible to convey any such unique experience through a common language (a common language which also inevitably folds back to structure that experience)?

Is there a unique nature to blind sensory experience?

Blind and visually impaired people utilise and experience their senses in different ways to those who have full vision. For example it has long been recognised that attending to tactile-acoustic stimulation becomes extremely important for those people who are blind or partially sighted (Keller 1911; Diderot 1999). For example skills such as 'echolocation' (Arias 1993) and attention to auditory and tactile clues become crucial to the navigation and interpretation of the environment, replacing information which may otherwise have been gained in conjunction with sight (Hill 1985; Cook 1992; Golledge 1992; Allen 2004). In the exchange of letters on blindness between blind activist Milligan and philosopher Magee, Milligan writes 'It's possible indeed that blind people tend to use touch much more than sighted people to explore their immediate environment and that they actually feel more in continuity with, more a part of, their material surroundings.' (Magee and Milligan 1995, 21). Such attention to tactile-acoustic stimulation maybe understood as an extension of the practices those people with sight are likely to use for example when navigating a room in the dark (cf. Ingold 2000). However for the sighted touch is often experienced in conjunction with vision and vice versa (Gibson 1986). In the light active touch is likely to have a more immediate quality to it for those who are blind, for as research shows seeing a forthcoming touch allows an '...anticipatory tuning of the neural circuits' (Fiorio and Haggard 2005, 773) while if blind this anticipatory tuning cannot occur.

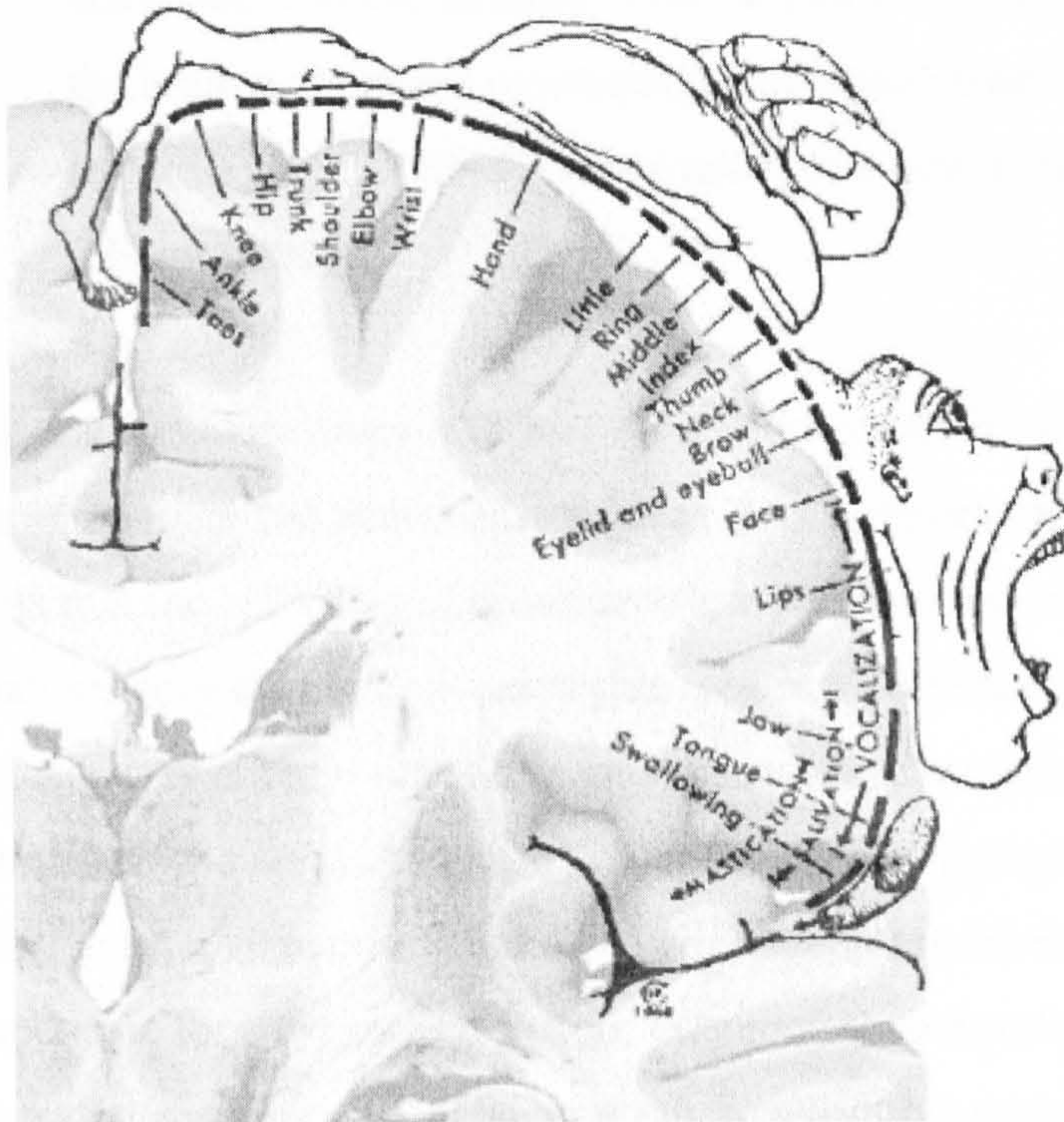


Figure 4.3 An image of a person drawn across the somatosensory cortex in proportion to the number of receptors coming from that part of the body. (genitals missing: reason unknown) (Morris and Fillenz 2003, 12)

Recent insights from neuroscience also show how long term blindness may result in significant cortical re-organization. Figure 4.3 shows how our capacity to perceive fine detail varies across the skin surface and tends to be highly developed in the tips of the fingers and lips. However, brain imaging reveals that this map of the body in the somatosensory area (the area that receives sensory information from the body) can vary with experience, so we experience cortical plasticity depending on how we use our body. For example, those people who are blind and read Braille are likely to have an increased cortical representation in the index finger which is used for reading (Morris and Fillenz 2003, 12). Neuroscientific research amongst those people who are congenitally blind goes further to show how the visual cortex is likely to also be reorganised in such a way as to respond to tactile stimulation. Psychologist Heller reviews such research and writes:

...the visual cortex is at work when blind people feel Braille, but does not appear to 'light up' when sighted subjects engage in the same

activities....These findings suggest that a very significant reorganisation of the brain occurs as a consequence of visual deprivation and, most curiously, suggests that the visual cortex takes on a new functional organization.
(Heller 2000, 3)

Thus, the somatosensory area and visual cortex are shaped through experience and culture, they are not necessarily a given. Most importantly for this discussion this means that the activities of those people with blindness can result in altered somatosensory area and visual cortex creating a distinct capacity in the brain of someone who is blind to receive and process tactile experiences⁶⁰ (See Chapter 7 on the touch of the feet for some empirically inspired thoughts on this matter). Thus, while I am not suggesting that those with blindness develop a sixth sense or fully compensate for their lack of vision; they may well develop distinct sensory processing capacities (dependant on their activities) which *potentially differ* from the average sighted person due to the necessary degree of attention given to tactile-acoustic sensation. This means that while researching and representing experiences is always fraught with difficulties of translation and interpretation, the unique nature of blindness might intensify some of these difficulties. However the distinct nature of blindness is just one of many other factors (such as education, background, first language and setting) which impinge upon any such research situation (a topic discussed further in Chapter 5).

In chapter 2 I argued that the body is emergent through it's 'interweavings' and our sense of embodiment is dependant on what we do. The fact that cortical organization varies depending on experience adds further weight to this argument and shows the way in which habits of embodied practice can become neurologically sedimented. This means that both our actual physical body and our sense of embodiment depend

⁶⁰ It is interesting to note how these insights from neuroscience confirm in some early speculation of deaf-blind author Helen Keller (1880-1968), who lost auditory and visual senses through illness at 19 months. For she writes that, 'I naturally tend to think reason and draw inferences as if I had five senses instead of three. This tendency is beyond my control; it is involuntary, habitual, instinctive. I cannot compel my mind to say "I feel" instead of "I see" or "I hear". The word "feel" proves no less a convention than "see" and "hear" when I seek for words accurately to describe the outward things that affect my three bodily senses. When a man loses a leg, his brain persists in impelling him to use what he has not and yet feels to be there. Can it be that the brain is so constituted that it will continue the activity which animates the sight and the hearing, after the eye and the ear have been destroyed?' (Keller 1908, 57) But of course what is still not precisely clear is what mix of biology, language and cultural practice compels Heller to think in terms of the five senses.

on how our body is put to use. As Latour (2004) writes ‘... to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning ‘effectuated’, moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans’ (206). There is no essential blind or sighted body, rather blind and sighted bodies and their differences come about through their interactions with the world: past, present and anticipated. In this account bodies may be understood as an ‘...interface that becomes more and more describable as it learns to be affected by more and more elements’ (Latour 2004: 207). The same body used in different ways results in differing senses of embodiment and capacities for understanding. There is no singular distinct identifiable blind experience, only tendencies and dispositions. Thus an individual blind testimony about their sensory experience cannot be taken as representative of all those people who experience blindness or visual impairment. Furthermore, that body must also be understood in relation to other objects and bodies. For as Helen Keller (1908) puts it ‘...the life of the deaf-blind cannot be severed from the life of the seeing hearing race.’ (58)

It might seem that the five senses would work intelligently together only when resident in the same body. Yet when two or three are left unaided, they reach out for their compliments in another body, and find that they yoke easily with the borrowed team. When my hand aches from overtouching, I find relief in the sight of another. When my mind lags, wearied with the strain of forcing out thoughts about dark, musicless, colorless, detached substance, it recovers its elasticity as soon as I resort to the powers of another mind which commands light, harmony, color.

(Keller 1908, 58)

Articulating the sensory experiences of blindness

While there is no singular unique blind sensory experience, it is clear that there is a general tendency amongst blind and visually impaired people to become more reliant upon auditory-tactile senses and this reliance can actually alter somatosensory and cortical organization. However, is it possible to convey this potentially distinct nature of blind sensory experience through language? Can anyone speak of their distinct sensory experiences? And what limitations might there be on any such blind ‘body

talk'? These questions begin to be discussed here, but they also re-emerge in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

While people with blindness may develop a greater degree of receptivity to tactile acoustic impression, this doesn't necessarily mean that talking about touch is easy for them. Nor does it mean that their statements about touch are any more authentic or unmediated – a mistake of previous humanistic research with blind people (Hill 1985). For example, Warnock (1960) notes critically commenting on psychologist Von Senden's interviews with blind people, '...it is important to remember that blind men learn language from sighted persons and may not, though they have thus learned to say the usual things, attach quite the usual senses to what they say' (324).

Warnock's outdated comment is of interest here because it draws attention to issues regarding the immersion of those who are blind in sighted discourse, the capacity of those who are blind to 'see' with their other senses and the extent to which those who are blind might also have the capacity to express their alternate sensory experiences.

For some philosophers of language, our use of language reflects and presupposes the use of our bodies (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Scharfstein 1993; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). For example, ocular metaphors from 'scope' to 'scan' aid in the process of ordering and understanding concepts and ideas, while basic positional concepts such as up-down, left-right, toward-away from indicate that when we orientate our body we are also orientating our minds. It is argued that understanding is achieved, at least in part, through our 'common embodiment' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999)⁶¹. For example, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) write that '...no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis' (19). While in their book 'Philosophy in the flesh' (1999), they suggest that 'Truth is mediated by embodied understanding and imagination' (6) proceeding to argue that, '...the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment. The same neural and cognitive systems which allow us to perceive and

⁶¹ As Lakoff and Johnson express in their earlier work on metaphor '...the system of conceptual metaphor is not arbitrary or just historically contingent; rather, it is shaped to a significant extent by the common nature of our bodies and the shared ways in which we all function in the everyday world' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 18)

move around also create our conceptual systems and modes of reason.’(4)⁶². In a similar vein philosopher of language Scharfstein (1993) argues that:

The understanding of language depends upon shared experience. The most fundamental experience we share is that our immediate selves, by which I mean our bodies, modes of perception, emotions, and social needs. When we try to explain unshared experience, we have no choice but to fall back on what has already in fact been shared, and when we fall back on it the process of explanation is likely to be word consuming, time-consuming and not very successful. (2)

Following this logic, Scharfstein (1993) proceeds to suggest that lacking sight is a particularly significant embodied difference in relationship to language, arguing that if we do not have vision we may lose the corresponding ability to think through visual metaphor:

...the sensory difference between the blind or deaf and the others is never compensated for completely. As the result of the lack of common experience, a complex gap is created; and because what is unshared is impossible to put into words, it exerts an effect that can never quite be overcome. (4)

From such arguments it follows that the more differences there are between our bodies the more difficult it is to reach shared understanding through language. However as discussions of embodiment in the previous section and Chapter 1 have indicated, embodiment is an issue which is far more complex than these philosophers of language acknowledge.

⁶² For example Lakoff and Johnson show how concepts such as colour are dependant on our embodiment. They argue that there is no greenness of grass independent of our individual retinas, colour cones and brains. For them colours are dependant on our individual biological body encountering the world, there is no colour in the world itself. But this ignores the inter-subjective and collective nature of language and belief illustrated by Diderot three centuries earlier. Colour does not necessarily reside in the individual. Coloured objects generate affective value which circulates and those who are blind would find it hard to ignore the significance of colour in a sighted world (a topic of Chapter 7).

Scharfstein's argument relies on a notion of a fixed 'common embodiment' and thus neglects more interconnected, mobile and time dependant interpretations of embodiment (Latour 2004). There is no pre-existing, fixed, unitary anthropocentric point of view that would always determine language, and our actual sense of embodiment and sensation depends on our relationship with other bodies and in lacking sensation it may be possible to experience a sort of proxy stimulus through another person's experiences and words. Thus, while for Scharfstein the common bodily basis to language means that 'our words seem adequate only for the most ordinary experiences at their most usual intensities' (1993, 1). What he ignores is the variety of embodiments that we might be able to assume through our interactions with others and the world *and* the creative potential of language (Irigaray 1993).

Furthermore, Scharfstein's argument that lacking sight is a particularly significant bodily difference in relationship to language relies on the simplistic idea that we receive a distinct set of sensations from each of our senses. It overlooks the possibility of cross-modal forms and synaesthetic forms of perception which blur the boundaries between the senses and complicate distinct understandings of touch and sight⁶³. Such cognitive processes and adaptations continually thwart the assumed simplicity of distinct sensory experience (Damasio 1999). Thus while people with blindness may lack the physical faculty of sight that does not mean that they have no appreciation of the visual properties of objects for we don't only see through the eyes (Hetherington 2002, 191); touch, language and the visual cortex also have a role to play (Hollins 1985; Kennedy et al. 1992; Kennedy 1993). Thus, *there is a complex inter-weaving of personal experience into language, but also linguistic constructions fold recursively back and effect how people perceive.*

In English there is a tendency to assume a distanced and objectifying mode of vision as the primary way in which we apprehend knowledge (Jay 1994; Howes 2003). This assumption may effect how those with blindness experience and articulate the world. For example deaf-blind writer Helen Keller expresses some of these potential

⁶³ For example, a small minority of people who experience synaesthetic perception can taste colour and see sounds (Sacks 1986) while touch helps to make sense of vision (Gibson 1986) and may even constitute a partial substitute for vision (Heller 2000).

discursive and experiential pressures of the predominantly sighted and hearing world she was born into:

The experience of the deaf-blind person, in a world of seeing, hearing people, is like that of a sailor on an island where the inhabitants speak a language unknown to him, whose life is unlike that he has lived. He is one, they are many; there is no chance of compromise. He must learn to see with their ears, to hear with their ears, to think their thoughts, to follow their ideals.
(Keller 1908, 78)

These discursive and experiential pressures experienced by Keller are also worth comparing to the pressures experienced by Nunez in H.G. Wells' story *'The country of the blind'*⁶⁴. However, in light of Keller's statement and for the purposes of this argument it is useful to return to the quote from Hull (1997) cited at the beginning of this chapter: 'Rain' Hull writes, '...has a way of bringing out the contours of everything; it throws a coloured blanket over previously invisible things'(26-27). As I have already discussed, Hull attempts to convey a tactile-acoustic world of blind experience in his autobiography. He even suggests that he loses a sense of objects having visible characteristics, yet, interestingly, he still utilises visual metaphor to describe what rain does. Of course it is impossible to know precisely what motivates his use of visual metaphor: Is it the sighted audience? The way in which tactile-acoustic impression of rain stimulates areas of his visual cortex? His sighted past? What is sure is that it is a complex mix of biology and culture.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have shown how blindness and sightedness are mutually defining. Blindness has been represented as a form of ignorance or punishment in opposition to the prioritization of sight and light in Western thought; it is also found to be a

⁶⁴ For example in H.G. Wells' story *'the country of the blind'* (Wells 1998) a sighted traveller, falls off a mountain and lands in a valley inhabited only by blind people who are unaware of sighted existence. He falls in love with a blind girl and wants to stay, but the elders dictate that he must remove his eyes in order to become a normal citizen. For the elders Nunez's sight leaves his brain '... in a state of constant irritation and distraction.' Nunez eventually decides the sacrifice is too great and escapes. The story shows how humans are prone to judge what is normal by their own experience.

condition that has been represented as enabling forms of insight in opposition to the idea of vision as distracting or illusory. Advances in education and the social status of blind people mean that in the twentieth century people with blindness have begun to represent themselves within this arena and social scientific accounts have drawn upon these representations and upon other testimony of blind people in order to elucidate the nature of sensory experience. However this chapter has shown that if we take autobiographical and interview statements of blind sensory experience at face value we risk ignoring wider discursive and political structures which operate to constrain the blind body, its actions and interpretations. This includes the ways in which people participate in collective (predominantly sighted) regimes of truth about the world and may respond to long standing stereotypes of touch and blindness. There is no pure blind sensory experience to be uncovered and we cannot ignore the fact that sight and blindness are mutually defining. We must therefore be wary of relying on blind testimony about sensory experience as somehow authentic. For blind embodiment as well as blind speech emerges through interweavings with other objects and bodies and we must attend to these interweavings and to the limits of testimony.

Chapter 5 – Methodology

Introduction

The empirical element of this thesis has entailed ethnographic research with specialist walking groups for blind and visually impaired people. In this chapter I document the ‘nuts and bolts’ of how this empirical research occurred before moving on to address more substantive interpretative issues. The research was carried out with the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group (SVIWG) and the disabled holidays charity ‘Vitalise’. The research design was unfolding and entailed acting as a sighted guide, participant observation, writing extensive field notes, talking while walking and in-depth interviews. These research methods were also supported and elaborated through the occasional use of a camera and video camera (when I was not required to guide) and the use of secondary material such as written and artistic representations of the experience of blindness.

These qualitative methods were chosen to help me explore how landscape is experienced and contributed to, by walkers with blindness. The choice of researching a ‘regular’ walking group and a ‘holiday’ walking group was motivated by a concern to reach a diversity of walkers with blindness who visited typical walking areas renowned for their scenic landscape. I was not so interested in comparing and contrasting these groups. Rather, in the tradition of ethnography, I was interested in creating rich, information-dense qualitative data that could elucidate specific contextual experiences of blindness and landscape. Such rich data could not have been generated by using quantitative methods, questionnaires or highly structured interviews.

The research strategy I adopted builds on theoretical insights of non-representational theory including the insights into the ‘performative’ (Thrift 1997) nature of much social life (including social research); the way in which practice opens up particular spaces of landscape (Wylie 2002) and the acknowledgement that context and practice also affect what we can put into words (Latham and Conradson 2003). In so doing the research strategy does not aim to be representative of all blind walker’s landscape

experiences. Rather, through acting as a sighted guide for walking participants the methodology attempts to go beyond the remit of a one-off interview and construct particular 'spaces of disclosure' which allow some of the textured, multiple and potentially, contradictory elements of blind landscape experience to come to light. This chapter will discuss the development of this methodological approach in more detail, researcher ethics and responsibilities and how the methods I chose worked out in practice. In so doing the chapter reveals the ways in which social research inevitably entails difficult decisions, complex multi-faceted relationships and incomplete understandings (cf. McDowell 1997, 390).

Getting involved and accessing research participants

I gained access to walkers with blindness through volunteering as a sighted guide for the specialist walking groups Vitalise and the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group (SVIWG). In total I attended 18 day walks with SVIWG and 3 week long trips with Vitalise (dates and locations listed in Appendix A). Due to the occasional nature of the walking trips and holidays and the small numbers of SVIWG walkers attending in winter, this research engagement was not an intense period of 'immersion in the field' but, rather, was spread out over the course of almost 2 years, between February 2004 and December 2005.

Other less successful ways in which I attempted to access walking participants including a call for information and volunteers through the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) audio publication the 'New Beacon'. In January 2004 I also began volunteering as a guide with the local Tyneside recreation club and attended a training course for sighted guides. This initial entrance into the 'field' helped me to ground my initial research ideas about blindness and landscape in the context of people who actually experienced a range of sight conditions. However, the infrequency of trips run by the Tyneside group meant that I was not to get the exposure I wanted for the research to be a success. Therefore I chose to focus my research on specialist walking holiday groups Vitalise and the nearest other regular walking group SVIWG, located through the RNIB website. SVIWG are one of only a few regular specialist blind and visually impaired walking groups in Britain. The others include the London Blind Rambling Club, St. Dunstan's Blind Walking

Group, Brighton; Cardiff Ramblers; and Tyneside Recreation Club for the Blind. Other activity clubs in Britain for people with blindness or visual impairment also run walking trips, but these tend to be on a more ad hoc basis.

My decision to focus on SVIWG was motivated by the relative proximity of the group and the fact that these people walked in areas of the Peak District and the South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire countryside – areas of particular interest because they were once key to the construction of a picturesque landscape aesthetic ideal (Andrews 1989) and to fights over access, which most famously culminated in the trespasses on Kinder Scout (Rothman 1982). The SVIWG group were also easy to access for they were in need of volunteers, particularly for their monthly Wednesday walks. In Summer 2005 I spent three months living in Sheffield to enable me to attend walks easily, do follow up interviews on the days following the walks and get involved in the wider activities of the group such as social meals. The early initiation and ongoing nature of the empirical work meant that my reading and literature reviews evolved alongside the empirical research.

The other key way in which I accessed research participants was through the disabled holidays charity Vitalise who visit areas of the Lake District. The Lake District was an appealing research location for similar reasons as the Peaks, for the Lakes are also an area traditionally appraised for their scenic beauty and much of the early landscape literature focused on the Lakes. Therefore, the fact that blind and visually impaired groups visited the Lakes seemed to be a useful way in which the research could ultimately receive attention from those concerned with concepts of landscape and landscape value. In June 2004 Anna (see Appendix B for participant profiles) invited me on one of the Vitalise trips to the Lakes when she responded to a call I had put out for information through the 'New Beacon'. Since attending that week I attended two further weeks with Vitalise, guiding walkers and interviewing where possible.

By spending whole weeks with the Vitalise groups I was able to get to know people in an informal setting, interview people in the evenings (when time and space allowed) and chat on the walks in a similar way to the SVIWG groups. Whether I met and interacted with participants through SVIWG or Vitalise obviously, had a

bearing on what I took away from the research process, while in SVIWG I would hear about people's day to day lives and get to know people over an extended time period, on the Vitalise trips I would get to know people quite quickly but only in a holiday setting away from their usual day to day existence and social networks. In both cases I only got to know participants in detail in rural leisure time-spaces. Thus my field notes and interpretations can only be considered reflective of these specific research contexts.

The age of walking participants and interviewees ranged from 22-80. Blind or visually impaired walkers who were interviewed totalled 19. This included 7 women and 11 men. In addition I formally interviewed 6 sighted guides (See Appendix B, for full profiles of participants). In both walking groups the majority of blind and sighted participants were of retirement age and of white working or middle class backgrounds, reflecting the more general class and ethnic balance in participation in countryside recreation in Britain (Harrison 1991). However amongst the interviewees there was 1 person who was born and raised in Iran and was of Iranian decent and 1 person of Afro-Caribbean parentage. While ethnicity, class and gender were not a primary focus for this piece of research, such positionings are worth noting, for a person's blindness or visual impairment was not necessarily a key fixed point for their sense of identity – a point Priestley (1995) makes in his work with visually impaired Asians in Leeds. People I interviewed also occupied ethnic, family, leisure and professional roles. Therefore, while blindness may have some specific embodied effects (Chapter 4), we cannot assume a singular identity of participants based around their disability. Nor can we assume that blind walkers inherit a single homogenous cultural inheritance of walking or viewing the countryside; rather, contemporary views and interpretations of the countryside potentially emerge from a diversity of landscape experiences and a variety of socio-spatial, gender, class and ethnic networks (Tolia-Kelly 2006).

Ethical principles and informed consent

In this research project I have sought the informed consent of participants, assured them of confidentiality and anonymity and adhered to the ethical guidelines set out by the British Sociological Association (British Sociological Association 2002). I

sought consent from the group leaders of Vitalise and SVIWG prior to my participation. I stressed the voluntary nature of participating in the research, introduced myself to the groups and the people I was guiding as a social researcher, explained to them clearly what my research was about from the outset: How blind and visually impaired people experience and contribute to the landscape. I have used pseudonyms throughout the thesis to protect the identities of participants who so kindly gave their time and thoughts. While some participants wanted to be identified in this research by their real name, I decided this was inappropriate for the multiple personal details revealed in this thesis could, in sum, be used inappropriately, while sight impairment may compound vulnerability to being misled. This is not participatory research whose primary aim is to directly benefit research participants. However, by acting as a sighted guide my immediate research practice directly benefited participants and caused them no apparent harm.

While guides to research ethics prioritize informed consent as a crucial standard in social research, this was a standard which was harder to identify in practice (Mason 2002). It was interesting to observe how my own introductions were often subverted or re-interpreted into participants own frameworks of understanding. I was normally introduced by group leaders as a student, rather than a researcher, while a number of participants thought I was somebody concerned with the design of gates, stiles and paths for this was a researcher role they were familiar with. The majority of participants seemed unconcerned about why exactly I was there or what the research was about. As long as I could guide and laugh at myself I seemed to meet both the Vitalise and the SVIWG group criteria of acceptability. The welcoming and uncritical attitude that I tended to be treated with was also indicative of a more general 'friendly disposition' amongst the groups (discussed in Chapter 9). I think if I had come into contact with more politicised disability movements, then my research may have been subjected to more critical scrutiny by participants. Research participants chose whether to be interviewed by me, however, the fact that I was also relied upon as a sighted guide meant at times they had little choice but to hold onto me whether they wished to be in direct contact with a social researcher or not. Such unequal research relations are thought to be an inevitable element of researching marginalised or vulnerable groups (Katz 1998) and it would seem that some of these research power relations can only be acknowledged rather than ironed out.

In recent years social research with disabled people has tended to be participatory work aimed at advancing the agendas identified by the researched (Oliver 1995; Butler and Bowlby 1997). Such research has been mobilized around the 'social model' of disability and the idea of a common disabled experience of oppression (Parr and Butler 1999). While I recognise that research aimed at empowerment and advocacy can be extremely important, I do not think it is the only way in which social research with disabled people should proceed (a point discussed in Chapter 2). There is a danger that only doing research with disabled people which entails participatory and empowerment work reproduces constructions of disabled people as inevitably oppressed and dis-empowered (Priestley 1995; Goodley 1999). Furthermore, it is suggested that by virtue of a researchers training, researcher observations are likely to go beyond that which the researched may necessarily identify themselves (cf. Thrift 1999).

In order to speak to audiences outside Disability Studies and to advance debates about landscape, embodiment and representation, I have chosen to mix first hand accounts of blind experience with more conceptual and theoretical issues associated with the concept of landscape and the experience of blindness or visual impairment. This includes non-representational perspectives on embodiment, insights from neuroscience and my own ethnographic reflections. In this way ideas of disability and embodiment are stretched beyond that which the researched might be able to identify themselves. This approach may still be understood to be in the general interests of the researched for this research is shifting social scientific understandings of the subject and experience to encompass a greater diversity of embodiments. Here the inter-corporeal and time-space dependent nature of disability is highlighted; it is also recognized that disability is a likely subject position for most people at some point in their lives.

I am neither blind nor visually impaired. However, some researchers advocate the position that only those with a comparable disability should do disability research with that subject group, for they will best understand the issues of the researched (Oliver 1995). This positive discrimination is useful in so far as it helps disabled academics into the field of social research. However, at times it can result in an odd

reverse discrimination founded on the tenuous idea that by virtue of a similar disabled body a person will be able to do better research or communicate better than someone with an able body. However, as we have begun to note both the researcher and researched occupy a diversity of embodied subject positions and the idea that I would be able to communicate better simply by virtue of a similar disability ignores an array of other cross cutting factors such as age, ethnicity, sexuality and social background which may effect researcher and researched communication. These factors are discussed where appropriate in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

The embodiment of ethics

While I have tried to adhere to ethical guidelines set out for social research (British Sociological Association 2002) the theoretical approach of this research also requires me to recognise how I have been involved in a form of ‘ethics based in practice’. While ethical guidelines constitute ideals and principles to which we might aspire, our ethical practice, like the rest of our everyday activities, does not always flow from principles and reflective choice. As Chapter 2 discussed, at times we are not the knowing, rational and reflective subject that ethical principles require. Once in the field of research we also practice what might be thought of as a form of situated, habitual ethics or ‘ethical know-how’ (Varela 1999, 64). Therefore, when talking of the ethics of ethnography it is also important to acknowledge both reflective moral principles to which we might aspire and also a separate realm of embodied ethical know-how. These ethics flow from culturally and neurologically ingrained habitual dispositions and immediate pre-reflective responses to certain situations (Caputo 2003).

Prior to meeting with the walking groups I had read guidance on how to guide a person with blindness and attended a training course for volunteers working with blind and visually impaired people delivered by the Newcastle Society for the Blind. While I hoped that this preparation would enable me to act as a competent sighted guide from the outset, initially acting as a sighted guide was a responsibility which left me feeling floundering and foolish. It was only after a period spent with these specialist walking groups that I found myself with a range of habits and dispositions which were suitable to the group dynamic and competencies. For example, I would

utilise touch to introduce myself as well as sound – a verbal signal and a hand on the arm to make contact, as no eye contact was available. I would shift my arm back as we were getting off a bus so that the person behind me could hold onto it if they needed to; I would make a noise to indicate my location or I would even lead a trail of people hand on shoulder out of the pub. These embodied adaptations became a sort of looking and feeling for others – an embodiment of their disability. In fact, my attention was drawn to the habitual nature of this practice, for when I wasn't required for guiding I would still find myself allowing for the width of two people on a path and watching the terrain for 'ankle bashers' (many participants' term for ankle level rocks and gullied paths) and low branches. Thus guiding enabled me to absorb into my own 'body schema' (Merleau-Ponty 1962) an embodied form of ethics that depends on direct experience. It also made me view the landscape in particular ways – a looking for two (a point discussed in Chapter 7).

The ethnography in context

While I use the term ethnography, I am not attempting to describe a singular culture or community, for social, physical and virtual mobility means that culture can no longer be understood to exist amongst a singular group within a neatly bounded physical space (Hine 2000, 58; Cloke et al. 2004, 181). Blind and visually impaired people may have common experiences on the basis of their visual impairment and their medical and social treatment (and this was particularly the case for those born blind and who attended a specialist blind school). However, as I discussed in the previous section, beyond this aspect of their embodiment and identity, participants occupied a range of embodied subject positions. Ian, one of the interviewees, was also keen to emphasise this point,

Ian ,45 , SVIWG, Blind since the age of 11

... when all is said and done we are all individuals, we all have our own opinion about different things, and we all have our own individual capabilities, so the general public, the biggest mistake they make is they see one and they think everybody is like that and they are not they are individuals, in their own rights, they've all got capabilities; some are better at doing some things than others and it depends on the individual.

Instead of assuming that blind and visually impaired people were an oppressed group with a set of common understandings, I adopted an ethnographic attitude which left me open to new interpretations and understandings of these people. Haraway (1997) sums up such a disposition well when she writes of ethnography as an exposure to risk:

“Ethnography” in this extended sense, is not so much a specific procedure in anthropology as it is a method of being at risk in the face of the practices and discourses into which one inquires. To be at risk is not the same thing as identifying with the subjects of study; quite the contrary. And self-identity is as much at risk as the temptation to identification...Such a method is not about “taking sides” in a predetermined way. But it is about risks, purposes and hope – one’s own and others’ – embedded in knowledge projects. (190-191)

This exposure to risk is a reflective practice I have carried forward in both my empirical field noting practice and my wider reading. For example, I utilised myself and the way in which I responded and adapted to the research setting as a key tool for the ethnography and as a topic of field noting (cf. Cloke 2004, 169-170). Guiding and walking with the group enabled me to access experiences and practices as they unfolded in real time-space and allowed me to pick up on aspects of the day which may have seemed inconsequential to participants (Kusenbach 2003, 462). However the fact that I was a sighted guide also limited the range of research activities that I was able to do ‘on the job’; for guiding required concentration and attention on the individual being guided. Over rough terrain the practice of guiding could be extremely tiring, however I found the process of guiding an interesting and valuable experience in itself and an important way in which to gain the respect, trust and naturally occurring conversation of participants. Sustained exposure to walking group members also meant I was able to come away and reflect on the circumstances in which I found myself in and how I changed my behaviour accordingly - for example, adopting the good humoured disposition of the group (Chapter 9).

In the Vitalise holiday groups the paid group leader organized guides so that we swapped around every half day. Similarly, in SVIWG, guides swapped about a lot, however, this occurred on a more ad hoc basis and was organized by a partially sighted volunteer group leader. The swapping of guides meant I got to experience guiding everyone prior to interviewing them. This exposure was useful for it meant my questions were more refined and appropriate, while our familiarity often seemed to aid interview conversation and helped place examples in context. However, interestingly, the common experiences we had as participant and guide meant that sometimes our mutual understanding meant it was hard to get participants to talk about the most 'obvious' aspects of their walking in the countryside, for words were no longer thought to be required. Still, this lack of verbal explanation was an interesting element of the interview dynamic which is commented upon at appropriate points in the empirical sections.

Field noting

Field noting formed a significant mode through which the research encounter was documented. Field note 'jottings' had to occur in snatched moments between guiding; at lunch time or even on the toilet (cf. Crang 1995). Field noting was useful for both documentary and cathartic purposes (Widdowfield 2000). The notes I made varied in length depending on the nature and format of the day and stage of the research. In general I attempted to be attentive to participants and my own behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Entries occurred for notable events in the day such as setting off, negotiating a stile, changing over guides, lunchtime or a fall, and I attempted to document times, locations, actors, activities, objects, sequences, goals, and impressions in order to help me to understand how the research was starting to unfold through particular networks, relationships, circumstance and theories, following the guidance of Cloke et al. (2004). However, field noting was not a simple linear process, recalling what happened, when it happened and noting the significant dimensions of my encounters, involved returning to field notes and adding significant sections which I recalled at a later date (cf. Crang 1995). While only a few limited portions of these field notes have made it into the final write up stage of the thesis, the rough notes explored a range of ideas, some of which aided the development of wider themes and concepts advocated in the final thesis.

Immersion in the research context

No methodological approach to experience is neutral. Qualitative social research does not simply uncover the empirical world, rather our research representations are partial, incomplete and historically, socially and culturally situated (Haraway 1991) and qualitative research must be recognised to be a 'co-fabrication' between researcher and researched (cf. Whatmore 2003; see also Law and Urry 2004). Many social researchers, therefore, assert that we must acknowledge the partial and situated nature of our research through a reflexive research approach, for this enables the research to be more valid (Lincoln 2003; Katz 1998). For example, for visually impaired researcher, Butler (2001) such reflexive positioning strategies help the researcher '...to piece together a more complete picture of society.' (279)

Certainly my presence as a researcher to some extent creates and informs what I discover to be the experiences of these people. My white, middle class, comprehensively educated background and other aspects of my identity such as my own enjoyment of hill walking undoubtedly effect the questions I ask, how I interact with the researched, what I perceive as significant and thus what I ultimately end up representing as blind walker's experiences of landscape. In the empirical chapters I therefore, reflect further on how my interactions with the researched may contribute to the research productions. However, it is also important to recognize that revealing the 'positions' of researcher and researched is a problematic, partial, incomplete, socially and culturally situated process in itself (Rose 1997). Reflexive strategies rely on the idea that we can consciously access and know ourselves as human agents and elucidate our influences and other contextual influences on the research. However, the extent to which this is possible is highly questionable. For Crang (2003),

...too often exhortations to reflexivity and disclosure tend to depend upon and reproduce problematic notions of a stable, tightly defined, unchanging research project conducted by a singular researcher, with one stable essential identity, both between locations and over time, and suggest the latter is true of the researched. (497)

There is a danger that appeals to positionality can create a form of local ‘pointillist geography’ (Doel 2001) where ‘after all is signified and sited, there is the nagging problem of how to add movement back into the picture’ (Massumi 2002, 3). My identity and self presentation shifted during the course of the research depending on who I was interacting with. I was neither inside nor outside to the research group, rather my identity was a fluid and relational one. Positions and power relations were continually being redefined between the researcher and researched. For example, while normally guiding put in me in a position of some authority, when I broke my elbow and continued to come out guiding with the SVIWG group I also became the object of pity and assistance. Also the fact I was a researcher or that I had sight did not necessarily leave me in a position of authority and I was not the only one driving the way in which the research proceeded. Some research participants took control of the process from the outset and they ‘interviewed me’ on the walks by trying to find out what I wanted to know so they could give me the answer. Thus positioning always occurs *in relation* to the researched and the research contexts. This relationality of researcher identity and the difficulties of ever pinning down our precise positions are elements of the research to reflect upon further in the research write up for they cannot be simply cordoned off as an element of the methodology.

Walking and talking as research practice: Spaces of disclosure and thought

Walking with participants was not only a means of gaining access and developing rapport for subsequent interviews but also a research practice in itself. Walking with participants allowed an embodied appreciation of their day, walking also provided an opportunity to talk about life events and settings in a constantly changing environment. Conversation was prompted not only by my questions but by the setting, the activity and the shifting thoughts of both the participants and myself. The transitions in physical space seemed to also enable transitions in mental space (Chapter 3). When walking and talking, if we wished, we could ‘move on’ both literally and metaphorically. This made talking about difficult subjects easier and sensitive topics of conversation arose which may not have arisen in the more interrogatory context of the interview. Thus, it is an argument of this thesis that walking creates unique ‘spaces of disclosure’ unavailable to traditional ‘sit down’ interview formats.

Previous researchers have already recognised some of the benefits of bodily immersion in the research context and walking and talking as a research practice. This includes the way in which the body's rhythm and the changing contexts can combine to provide unique forms of interview data (Kusenbach 2003; Allen 2004; Anderson 2004) and how, in general, embodied participation can allow for unique reflections on practice as well as talk (McCormack 2002; Slavin 2003). However, the spaces of practice and talk that occurred between a sighted guide and a blind or visually impaired walking companion were quite unique, for our guiding relations were based on a high degree of trust, responsibility and communicative touch. This degree of physical proximity, trust and reliance led me to feel quite rapidly at ease with most group members.

While it is important to point out that guiding, walking and talking were useful and unique elements of the research process, I do not wish to overly romanticize walking as a research practice. Walking did not necessarily equate to total 'freedom of movement'— either mental or physical. While walking has been recognized as having a certain democratizing qualities (Solnit 2000), walking is also a disciplinary practice, with its own performative norms and values and more readily accepted topics of conversation (Darby 2000; Edensor 2000). Furthermore, the blind walker's reliance on me as a sighted guide meant the research was shot through with unequal power relations. Walking and the talking it elicited was also structured by the particular place and its affordances (De Certeau 1984; Macauley 1993). At times I found interactions with the research setting an 'interruption' to potentially useful chains of thought. The sights, sounds and smells which we encountered, or the necessity to refocus on an immediate activity such as negotiating a set of steps meant that walking and talking was not always the easiest of research interactions to 'manage'. No wonder Wordsworth composed his peripatetic poetry by pacing up and down flat gravel (Wallace 1993)!

It was my initial intention to do 'walking interviews' however I soon discovered that the specific demands of guiding and walking with visually impaired and blind people meant this was not a practical option. As soon as we encountered rough terrain, the concentration of both the guide and the visually impaired person tended to shift to

negotiating the terrain. Our outdoor location and the fact that we were walking with a group also tended to mean that attempts at record ‘walks and talks’ were interrupted by people, the weather or both. Therefore, I felt it was necessary to support field noted walking conversations with follow-up recorded in-depth interviews where participants had more time to reflect on their practices and express themselves outside of a group context. I also wanted to generate interview transcripts as well as have notes from ad hoc conversations, for I was aware of the powerful affect that people with blindness or visually impairment speaking of their experiences seemed to have on the reader. I did not want to lose this affect or drown it out with my own secondary reporting. For while the stories that these people had to tell of walking in the Lakes and Peaks are not necessarily reflective, they did seem to have a value in their own right above and beyond any theoretical twist or interpretation I may have overlaid on them.

Interviewing

In order to develop themes identified in the early ethnographic material and get blind and visually impaired people’s perspectives on their experiences I carried out in depth semi-structured interviews with walking group participants. These covered topics such as the individual’s history of sight loss or blindness and their experiences and motivations for walking in a group in rural space. I also carried out interviews with some of the sighted guides in order to get them to reflect on why and how they guide and what it felt like to be a guide (interview prompt sheets can be found in Appendix C). The in-depth interviews enabled me to gain some understanding of how being in a walking group and visiting rural space was interpreted, understood and fitted into the context of people’s day to day lives. The interviews also allowed the time and space for rich description of how people used their senses and body to navigate and reflect on the terrain. Because the interviews took place away from the group context, they also provided a space in which people could express themselves without other group members listening in.

The interviews took place in quiet locations which suited the participants. This included, the Mappin Street Centre for the Blind in Sheffield, in participant homes, cafés and in ‘quiet’ corners of youth hostels. Certainly the interviews’ ‘micro

geographies' (Elwood and Martin 2000) had some bearing on how well and in what style the interview proceeded. Vitalise made use of youth hostels so I had to choose quiet moments in the communal spaces in which to carry out interviews. In each case I noted down the location of the interview and any interruptions that were made. Interviews were carried out on an opportunistic basis and not everyone I met was prepared or felt they had the time to be interviewed. The Vitalise trips tended to be very intensive and I was unable to find the time to interview all of the participants. Interestingly, two people with minor visual impairments did not want to be interviewed for they felt they 'used their sight too much' and did not seem to want to identify with the other 'blind' Vitalise group members.

Some of my research questions (Appendix C) were not necessarily things which participants had previously reflected on. While many had been interviewed by disabled studies students interested in topics such as employment rights or access to public transport⁶⁵, none of them had been asked research questions about their country walking practices. Therefore, while interviews may be understood as a way of delivering opinions and view points, they may also be understood as a way of discovering thought and 'generating materials' (Whatmore 2003). For it is possible to be in possession of views that we have never fully verbally expressed (Scharfstein 1993). I hoped to bring verbal expression to some of these thoughts through my questioning and by deliberately asking questions which I thought might be counter to their view point. Therefore, the social world I have brought into being was not simply uncovered; rather it was 'produced' through construction of specific spaces of disclosure out walking and in the interview context.

In the following empirical chapters some of my interview questions come across as very direct. This is a deliberately provocative strategy I had to adopt in order to provoke a response amongst participants who otherwise would appear to have little to say. It was also a questioning strategy that I felt I was able to deliver given my familiarity with participants. Further, I sometimes felt I needed to be more direct because I could not be seen. With people who have sight, gestures can reinforce or

⁶⁵ One of my initial interview questions was: have you ever been interviewed by a social researcher before?

contradict a point and we can indicate the extent or ambivalence of our opinions. As philosopher of language, Scharfstein (1993) writes,

The meaning of spoken words is enhanced by facial expressions, gestures, shifts of the body, changes in gaze, and the personal and emotional qualities of the words ...often cooperation and conflict between these means of expression lends the words much of their often ambivalent subtlety. (2)

Some of the ambivalence conveyed through gesture is lost in interactions with those who are blind or who have lost their sight. Ambivalence required expression in other forms such as tone of voice or more apt choice of language. Amongst SVIWG members their willingness to talk to me as a researcher was often indicative of the amount of spare time many had, while interviews tended to last an hour, I would then find myself doing a range of tasks in exchange for their time; checking the dates of food in the fridge, purchasing items from the shop or accompanying them to the pub. For a number of interviewees I seemed to be a relief from some of the isolations and frustrations of living with blindness or a visual impairment. I was happy to briefly accept this role, glad of their participation in the research, but I was also keen to emphasise that I would also be leaving the 'field' so as not to mislead them (see also Goodley 1999 on leaving the field).

The use of visual methods and research ethics

In this thesis I use photos and video as a method of inquiry and as an aid to representing the research findings. As Pink argues in her book on visual methods, 'Photographs can be used to create critical representations that express experiences and ideas in ways written words cannot' (Pink 2001, 135). Photographs and other visual data are not necessarily better than words, but they can help to convey ideas and experiences in ways which might be difficult, even impossible, with written words, photographs may also enable the researcher and external audiences to re-envisage and question people's experiences better. However, the use of visual methods raises significant ethical issues in this research context for the researched were to be excluded from participating in the production or precise approval of video or photographic footage. I have, therefore, been torn between a desire to honour non-

visual or less visual ‘ways of knowing’ and a compulsion to be able to communicate my research to predominantly sighted audiences and interpret my research in the best possible manner. I highlight and discuss these research issues here.

From the outset of the research I have felt uncomfortable with using visual methods in the final thesis. Taking photos or bringing out the video camera seemed to bring to the foreground people’s visual disabilities in a leisure setting where they often seemed to want to forget their disability. Furthermore, one of my supervisors was against the use of visual methods, concerned that I would unwittingly reproduce a nineteenth century model of geographical knowledge as visual, empirical discovery (cf. Crang, 2001); certainly the camera was a clear counter-force to any attempt to ‘de-centre knowledge production’. I discussed these issues of sight, method and honouring non-visual ways of knowing with all the participants in the research. Most research participants took the pragmatic view that in a predominantly sighted world they understood the value of visual as well as oral communication. Therefore, while some people did express irritation with sighted people taking photos without even announcing their presence, these people were brought up as a way of contrasting their practice to my sensitive approach. All but one of the walking group participants gave their consent for visual material to be used.

I reconciled myself to the fact that I was not aiming to recreate the total experience of blindness (see the exhibition *Dialogue in the Dark* 2000 for an excellent attempt at this). In fact, I feared that recreating experiences of blindness in conference presentations may be demeaning and gimmicky for any attempt would not have been fully representative of the long term cognitive, embodied and socio-cultural affect of living with blindness or visual impairment. Thus, I have used visual material in this thesis in order to aid the analysis and communication of my research messages.

When taking photos or video footage I noted anyone who didn’t seem to want to be included (even if they said yes when asked directly), I announced my presence and sought permission if I did want to use a photo or video footage, explaining what it is like and where I might use it. I have made use of a limited amount of video material to aid research audiences in thinking through the processes involved in tactile-kinaesthetic perception (Chapter 6). I have also used some photographic material of people with blindness in scenic spots in the hope of highlighting embodied difference

and promoting a questioning in the reader of normative interpretations of landscape. However, I am aware that photos, like text, are liable to multiple interpretations and that the images do not simply speak for themselves (Pink 2001, 38-40), therefore, they have been deployed to work in conjunction with the accompanying text.

Methodological experimentation: Video

I have made some experimental and limited use of video material in this research. Video is helpful in revealing the way in which the body is an active agent in making knowledge: this is a process which is hard to capture through other methods (Heath 2004). Video does not side step research issues such as authorship, partial perspective, narration, selectivity or participant awareness of the researcher (Loizos 2000; Pink 2001). However, video footage goes beyond what photos can achieve for it does not just capture the pictorial, it captures movement and exchange, thus video material has the potential to change how and what we might recall (Crang 2003). Video has allowed repeated analysis of walking, enabling me to re-consider movements, slowing them down to a speed where they could be reflected upon and repeatedly considered (Chapter 6). This data is not self evident, rather in the research write up I support the data with commentary based on my wider observations and field notes.

Video is not only a means of recording research data it is also a technology which participates in the negotiation of social relations (Pink 2001, 79; Laurier and Philo 2003). People may change their behaviour and joke around in front of the camera while bringing the video camera out on walks in June 2005 altered my role from sighted guide to external observer. The presence of the video camera also revealed participant attitudes toward scenery and the video camera became part of the way in which I communicated with participants. Despite the fact that many of them couldn't see the video camera at all, the camera still became a novelty item for the group and a number of the blind and visually impaired walkers told me where to point it and what at. This included them insisting that I took footage of a famous dam and a particular view over the Peaks rather than 'just' them. In this way the video camera began to reveal to me the ways in which walkers with blindness would express a

desire to participate in collective visual cultures of landscape and memory (a topic of Chapter 7).

While the video camera was a potentially useful research tool, it clearly foregrounded blind and visually impaired people's exclusion from sighted practices and while they could tell me what to point the camera at, they could not approve of or appreciate the footage. I felt walking was a time in which people with blindness could sometimes forget such embodied differences so I continued to feel uncomfortable about the use of video. Ultimately the need for me to be a guide on the majority of the walks and the demands of other students for use of the use of one departmental video camera meant I was only able to take one useful video recording of a whole walk with the SVIWG group. The eventual focus on feet in the piece of video footage that I chose to use in an empirical chapter also sidesteps issues of revealing identities of participants.

Interpretative issues - Interview transcript analysis and the interpretation of ethnographic data

In this section I outline how I went about interpreting interview and ethnographic data and reflect on the balance of these two methods. As I have noted in the earlier section on the practicalities of interviewing, after I had acted as a sighted guide for walkers I would request an interview with them. Interviews took place in a variety of locations (noted in Appendix B). I recorded all the interviews I conducted with the walkers and transcribed these myself as soon as possible after the interview.

Transcribing interviews myself was a useful first step in analysing the interviews and beginning to pinpoint key concepts and ideas. It also allowed me to re-hear all the hesitations and pauses that were part of the interview talk. On a few occasions toward the end of the transcription process I did not transcribe interviews in their entirety and left out clearly irrelevant and longwinded digressions, noting this in the transcript. I carried out a preliminary reading of the data, marking all the significant sections of the interviews, annotating the transcripts with initial comments and ideas, and beginning to identify relevant themes, allocating a code to each one. The themes were drawn from topics that occurred through the interviews, ethnographic field notes and from theoretical ideas in the literature review.

I carried out several close readings of the transcripts, allocating codes to specific sections, sentences and phrases, and building up a detailed analysis. A sentence or section of text could have several codes attached to it, as the themes were not discrete or entirely unconnected topics. The coded sections were then 'cut and pasted' onto separate documents arranged by theme and sub-topics. This process allowed me to get an impression of the 'stories' within the data and to start to construct a series of narratives based on what I perceived to be the most significant themes. In working through the interview material I have found it necessary to distil quotes, effectively prioritizing certain arguments and leaving others to fall by the wayside. This process does present problems of disassociating sections of text from the wider context in which they occur, but I could refer back to the original interview transcript whenever necessary. The privileging of some data and the disregarding of other data is an inevitable stage in this sort of research process (Cloke et al. 2004, 231). The significance of data has been judged on the basis of relevance to the theoretical context and relevance to my ethnographic observations and field notes.

Ethnography and the practice of ethnographic field noting is plagued by questions relating to the reliability of the information, objectivity of the researcher and issues of how the data collected is ultimately combined with other information such as interview data and transformed into an academic text. In this research context ethnographic observations and field noting have primarily performed a supportive and guiding element to the interpretation of interview material. I did not want to feel as if I was continually effacing walkers with blindness' representations of themselves with my own writing and field notes, for it is not until relatively recently that people with blindness have been in a position to represent themselves (Chapter 4) and I felt it was important to honour this fact by giving considerable priority to interview quotes. While in the wake of NRT and other theories of culture and discourse, I feel compelled to discuss the ground upon which such walkers statements are made, by using interview statements I have achieved one of the initial objectives of the research which was to allow walkers with blindness' experiences of rural space to be heard.

However, it must also be noted that ethnographic and interview data did not always combine to support each other. There were differences between what I observed in practice out on walks and what participants chose to talk about in the interview context. This is clearly evident in Chapter 8, where I discuss which aspects of touch participants chose to talk about and reflect on the reasons why we choose to talk about certain aspects of experience over others. It is also evident in the way that one of my interests at the outset of the research – the nature and significance of ‘soundscapes’ (Porteous and Mastin 1985; Smith 1994; Wrightson 2000; Hedfors and Berg 2003) and an interest in rhythm-analysis (Lefebvre and Regulier 1999; Lefebvre and Regulier 2004) were ultimately discarded in favour of discussions which prioritized participant voices. For sound was not a topic that blind walkers spoke about at any length despite my questioning and despite the fact that sound was clearly significant to their navigation and orientation, and to their experience of the countryside as more ‘peaceful’. This lack of interview talk about sound is perhaps attributable to the limited vocabulary that we have for sound (Smith 1994; Smith 2000; Howes 2003). I prioritize themes of vision, touch and laughter because they stretch our conceptualizations of landscape well beyond the idea of landscape as apprehended through the individual’s physical faculty of sight. However, I also chose these themes because participants spoke freely on these topics.

Open spaces of writing

It is thought that the challenges and complexities of analysis and writing up tend to be under discussed elements of social scientific research (Crang 2005). My own writing style attempts to combat this problem through laying bare some of the limitations and difficulties I have had in interpreting the research data. While some formal guides to writing up social research tend to employ metaphors of clarity as ideals for writing up and continue to suggest that the social researcher should frame their account in an objective, scientific manner (Cryer 2000), increasingly this ideal of author invisibility is coming under question (Brady 2000; Spry 2001; Dewsbury 2003; Whatmore 2003). The author, discourse and the writing all intervene and work to produce research findings. In fact the process of writing up can be understood as an extension of the analytical stage allowing ideas to be worked through in detail and conclusions drawn (Richardson 2000).

I have, therefore, chosen a writing style which both foregrounds my participation in the research productions via the frequent use of 'I' and I use a style which does not lend itself to simplistic summaries or conclusions; instead it opens up a space of thought which highlights the hard to pin down in our thinking. This writing style follows a recognition that, 'the world is more excessive than we can theorise' and that it is therefore important to mobilise accounts of the world that 'leave a space for something else to happen' (Dewsbury 2002, 437-440). It also follows feminist insights into the silencing of the personal, subjective and emotional in social research (Widdowfield 2000; Bennet 2004; Anderson and Smith 2001, 7) working as a counter to this process through a valuing of more personalized forms of knowledge. While I chose particular themes in the empirical write up I acknowledge the differences between each example and attend to elements that do not fit my original ideas.

Feeding back and giving back

One ideal of the research process which is frequently promoted is feeding back to research participants the research findings (Mason 2002). The ideal opportunity arose for this when I was asked to attend SVIWG's annual Annual General Meeting (AGM). The group leader asked me to talk at the AGM, so I suggested I could say something about the research and how it has progressed to date. Unfortunately when it came to finalising details they did not want to hear seemingly bland research data about themselves, rather they requested a humorous talk. So rather than directly feedback to participants, I spoke about some of the literature review content, such as the opium eaters in the Lakes and the poetry of British walkers. I performed the role of 'public academic' rather than a participative researcher. It is also interesting to note how group members' request for a humorous talk revealed once more, something of how the group saw itself, not as a political movement of people with blindness, but as a group which keeps people entertained – I contributed to that process.

This research has also had some indirect and wider potential benefits to participants. This included feeding additional relevant information into the Countryside Agency

Diversity Review via their regional consultation workshop in York 2005 and at a Sensory Trust Workshop in 2005. Both these workshops were aimed at landscape planning practitioners and countryside professionals thinking through their policies in the wake of the Disability Discrimination Act and addressing issues of access and accessibility. Through attending these events I helped to convey the experiences and ideas of research participants, circulated an outline of my research to date and discussed the research with attendees. During my fellowship year following this thesis I also plan to re-establish contact with these audiences, distribute executive summaries of relevant elements of my research and write magazine articles targeted at magazines read by planning practitioner and visual impairment rehabilitation workers⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ From interviews with Vitalise holiday participants it strikes me that there is an unmet demand for blind and visually impaired people to get outside and get regular led exercise. Certainly there is no countrywide delivery of specialist walking groups by social services rehabilitation teams and there maybe opportunities to develop projects in this area for it is simply a matter of matching walkers with blindness to volunteer guides.

Chapter 6 – A Day's Walk with the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group



Photo 6.1 Members of SVIWG in woods near Malin Bridge, Sheffield

Synopsis

In the first section of this chapter I outline a typical day's walk for the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group in order to draw attention to the sort of everyday and habitual practices and talk which constitute a typical walk with the group, and in order to contextualize subsequent thematically ordered work. In the second section of the chapter I reflect on a video clip which details a particularly challenging moment in the walk for someone who has recently lost their sight. The clip and my accompanying commentary draw attention to the embodied skills which may need to be re-learned after sight loss in order to navigate country and city terrain. In sum, this chapter shows the ways in which walkers with blindness experience the countryside through their own bodies and the sighted guide's bodies. I also show how the physical and material challenges of a countryside setting can bring visual disability to the fore and how the particular challenges of blind countryside walking render this practice (particularly for the uninitiated) more analogous to an adventure sport such as climbing than a gentle contemplative stroll in the countryside.

Introduction

Recently, calls have been made for representational experimentation in geography in order to open up this realm of intuition and embodied practice to improved social analysis and understanding (Thrift 1997; Crang 2005). However, a considerable proportion of these efforts have been directed at new ways of writing inspired by avant-garde and performative movements (Thrift 2000b; Dewsbury 2003) and, unfortunately, some of these written approaches have used dense language which is somewhat exclusive and inaccessible. While not all academic texts can be light reading, the dense language entailed in such non-representational styles of work can seem to take us further away from the actual practices being represented. It also means that such work only reaches a narrow and elite audience – the converted. The paradox is that many such texts continue to bemoan the fact that the majority of geographers are not taking practice, performance and non-representational work seriously enough (Thrift 2000a). This photo essay aims to be an antidote to this problem and a simple prelude to forthcoming chapters. It uses language and an approach inspired by the theoretical perspective laid out in Chapter 2, but it aims not to digress into overly complex analysis.

A day's walk with SVIWG

In 1999 the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group (SVIWG) was initiated through the efforts of Jade, a member of the social services Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Team, and Terry, a keen Rambler who had suddenly lost his sight through retinal detachment and who had become very frustrated with being unable to get regular exercise in the countryside. In October 1999 they both attended a meeting of the local Ramblers Association (RA) to see what could be done for Terry and other able-bodied visually impaired people in Sheffield. Some members of the RA committee were resistant to the idea of assisting blind and visually impaired people apparently expressing concerns about liability, responsibility, insurance and the physical capabilities of those with blindness (interviews with Jade and Terry, Appendix B). However a number of the ramblers offered to be sighted guides and a separate walking group was set up. SVIWG went on their first walk in April 2000 and since then the group has arranged regular outings with members of the Ramblers Association, friends and family acting as sighted guides.

Since the initiation of SVIWG, the group's walking and social activities have expanded and the group now walks alternate Wednesdays and Sundays and every month with the Peak Park rangers on a Thursday. The group walks in the Peak District National Park and other parts of the South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire Countryside which are accessible by public transport. The turnout for walks varies between 10 and 20 people; members have to phone in advance to say they are coming so that walkers with blindness can be sure of a sighted guide. The group also arranges group holidays and has regular social activities, such as meals and theatre trips (Millgate 2004). The more fit and able blind and visually impaired walkers are now permitted to go out with the main RA group walks as long as they phone in advance and bring a sighted guide with them. However, some of them deliberately subvert this request and just turn up at RA walks without calling first, arguing that they are more fit and able than some of the sighted ramblers.

In this first section I utilise photographic, video and ethnographic material in order to present a descriptive photo essay which aims to introduce the reader to a walk with

the SVIWG walking group⁶⁷. Photos and text are used to track a typical day walk for the group – a walk of about 6 miles in the South Yorkshire countryside through woodland and farmland, starting in the centre of Sheffield, passing the Bradfield Parish Boundary Stone and ending up at a country pub. This format of choosing one particular day is used in order to retain a sense of fidelity to the original research situation and to set the scene for subsequent thematically ordered empirical work. Focusing on a specific day also allows me to discuss temporal elements of the day which serve to structure the walk. Typical things that I noted walkers saying are under each photo in bold and are followed by an outline of the day including reflections from my field notes. The point here is to attend largely to the banal, common place and everyday amongst this group and to reflect on my own role as a sighted guide and researcher in the group. By highlighting the sort of things people said, I also hope to indicate the way in which conversation was prompted or dulled by the activity, terrain and time of day (Anderson 2004). Of course, it is important to acknowledge that this is a singular account of one particular walk from the perspective of the researcher. It is thus a partial illustration of the walk – for reality is not a coherent, fully graspable entity.

⁶⁷ In subsequent chapters I will also draw upon interview and ethnographic material from the walking holiday groups 'Vitalise'. While vitalise trips lasted a week and were based in youth hostels, the format of each day and practices of guiding were very similar thus to avoid repetition I simply note any significant differences in practice between the two groups where appropriate.

9.00 am *I wait around the transport interchange in Sheffield for SVIWG, there are people dressed in rambling gear, but I am not sure if it is them yet (lots of ramblers use Sheffield public transport). I wait a few more minutes, then people with white canes arrive (often the only clear visible sign of their blindness) – I realise it must be SVIWG, so I go over and say hello. I have now been going out with the group regularly for over a year, but with over 80 members (including guides) there are*



often new people I don't know. I am treated much like any other sighted guide (despite reminding participants of my research). It seems easy to make myself be liked amongst the group - I just tend to follow other participant's conversational lead and stick to topics like holidays, past walks or the weather. When they joke, I laugh with them.

'Oh all the way down from Newcastle this morning to see us again then? Gosh you must like us a lot!'(laughter)

Photo 6.2 Members of SVIWG meet at the transport interchange

9.10 am *We are waiting for the tram to arrive. It is raining a little and conversation at this stage centres on the walking route, the weather and what people have chosen to wear that day. One lady curses herself for forgetting gloves another lady lends her a pair. People express a sort of feigned disbelief that I am coming out in winter, in trainers, for they all have boots on. They suggest that I will get very muddy and joke that they will not let me in the pub. Two visually impaired walkers are speaking to each other, orientated ear to ear. Henry⁶⁸ (on the right in the photo) rests his arm on a 'Leki' walking pole, his white cane in the other hand. This juxtaposition of a white cane crossed with a walking stick is also the symbol SVIWG use on their*

⁶⁸ Separate pseudonyms are used in these pictures in order to protect the anonymity of participants.

membership badges. There are 20 of us coming on the walk today but we are meeting the others at a tram stop up the line.

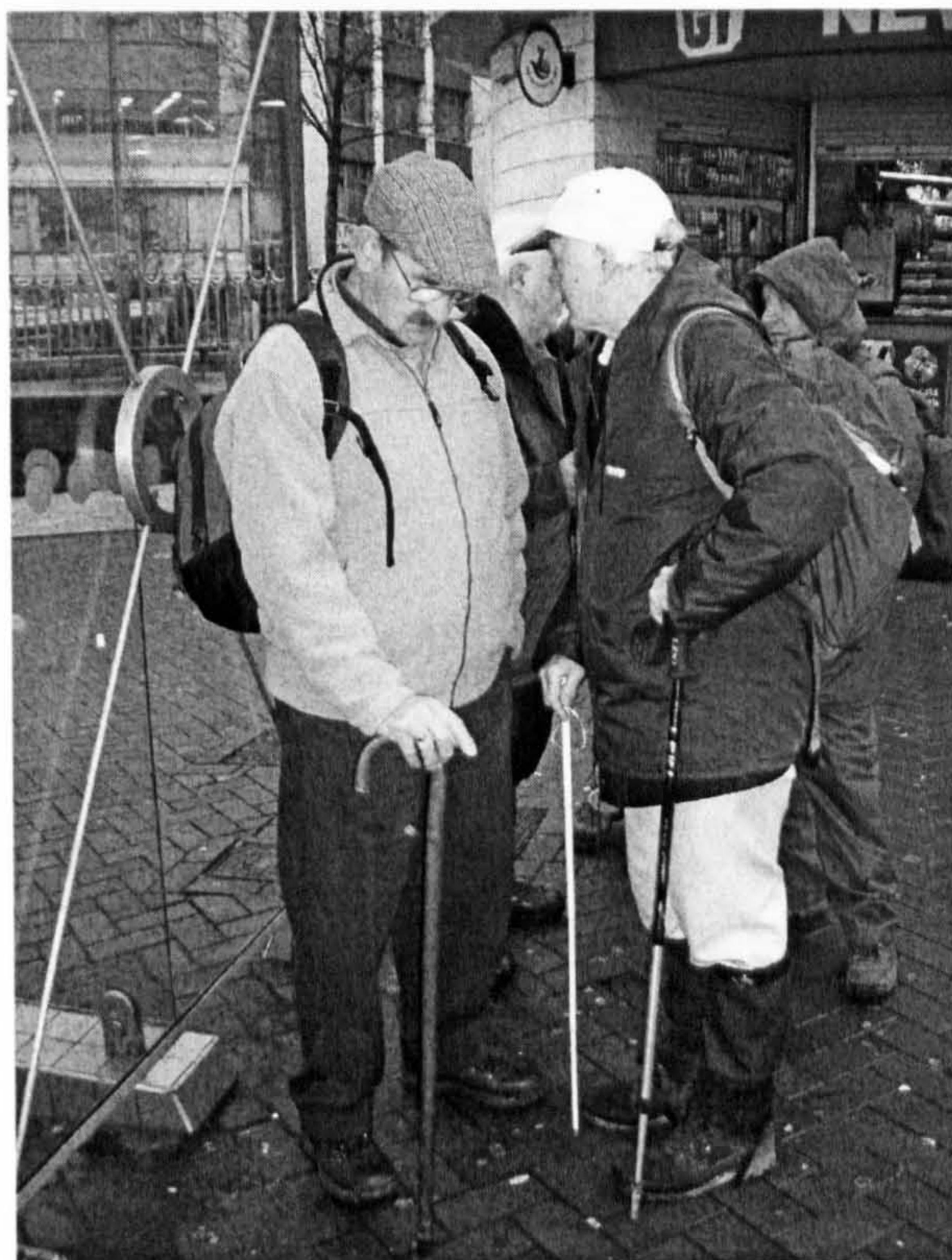


Photo 6.3 SVIWG members wait for a tram to arrive

‘Apparently the route we are doing is going to be quite muddy....’ ‘Yes, and Janet said that there was a fallen tree on one part of the path so we will have to do a detour round the road....’ ‘Is that our tram I can hear?’

9.15 am *The tram arrives and we shuffle on, vigilant sighted guides take up an active role, checking that everyone is ok and are with us and checking that people have found a seat on the tram if they need one. While many of the members made it to the tram stop independently, responsibility is now assumed and embodied by the guides – clearly a role that many of the guides enjoy and take pride in.*



Photo 6.4 The tram arrives

'Do you need a hand George or are you ok to get on by yourself?'

9. 30 am *We arrive at Malin Bridge tram stop and wait for the rest of the group who are meeting us at this tram stop. The walk leader checks everyone is ok and new members get introduced. People prepare themselves for the walk ahead. The walk has been recently checked by the allocated leader for that day; sighted members of the group take it in turns to be a walk leader, choose a walk and walk it, to check it is suitable for the group. Some people put gaiters on. Other members cluster into groups where chat centres on the day ahead and plans for the Christmas holidays. Guides get sorted out for the first part of the day. There is no particular ordered system, but there is a tendency for friends to stand together, to stand near someone you want to guide or be guided by. (In the Vitalise groups people are allocated a morning or afternoon with someone in a rotating system, so that no one gets 'stuck' with one particular person). People start to become restless waiting at the tram stop. Cheery but also waiting, they chat to fill a space, perhaps to detract from the cold weather. There is an eagerness to get going and get warm, I think.*



Photo 6.4 Meeting other walkers and guides at Malin Bridge

'Do you want me to guide you first Jean?'... 'yes fine'... 'and is there a side that you prefer to be guided on?'.... 'Well I have a bit more vision in my left eye so I prefer to be guided on the right if that's ok?'

9.45am *Everyone arrives and we begin to get going; as we start out there is a sense of cheerful anticipation now – we are doing what we have come for, but are not tired yet. As we climb the hill away from Malin Bridge, lungs and legs begin to work harder. Poles stabilize and give some tactile information of the terrain. People tend to be guided arm to arm where path widths allow this. Some of those people with blindness use the guide's body for stability, holding quite tight, others use the lightest of touches on the elbow – the 'C' grip (Illustrated in Photo 6.7). In each of these instances the point of view of the blind subject disperses through the guide's body. Other members of the group who have partial sight do not require tactile contact with a guide. Rather, a guide is allocated to look out for them and keep in their view.*



Photo 6.6 The walkers set off up the hill

‘Now, I have been thinking about the committee next year and I was hoping you might volunteer to be vice-president...’



Photo 6.7 The ‘C’ grip

The ‘C’ grip is the way that the rehabilitation worker recommends that walkers hold onto their guides when possible. It minimizes contact between walker and guide and it is useful because it means that the visually impaired walker is slightly behind and can, therefore, follow the movements of the guide, and also the guide does not have to bare any of the weight of the walker.

10.30 a.m. *Guiding styles have to change depending on the terrain, path width and particular preferences of the individual. Walkers may hold onto the back of the*

rucksack for guidance when paths narrow, while in the Vitalise groups a strap is also attached to the rucksack for this purpose.



Photo 6.8 Touching the back of the rucksack for guidance

‘Can I come back onto your arm yet?’...‘No, the path narrows again in a moment so it isn’t worth it’

10.45 am *As the terrain gets steeper, the movement of the guide helps to indicate any changes in terrain. As Jim in an interview explains to me,*

‘...what you need to go over the terrain safely is to know what’s coming up a fraction before you hit it and the sooner the better in fact, like if you have a guide in front of you then I would never hold the sling at full length, because that sling is so pliable it would knock out any bumps and things that you are going over; that’s why I would always hold the guide’s ruck-sack and the sling at the same time. So as to be just behind the guide, the downside being that I kick them in the heels, but the positive side being that whatever they have just been over I am just a fraction of an inch behind them and that makes it easier for them to guide me. They also know I have got the pole out and I can shorten or lengthen it if I know what’s coming and I can also use it as a brake if I lose my balance.’ (p5)

While some members move confidently through steep terrain despite their impaired vision others are a little more tentative for the way must be felt with cane and boots. Guides accommodate this fact and move slowly over steep or rough terrain. Any difficulties tend to be communicated either verbally or felt through the connection between the guide and the person with blindness, often verbal communication of any difficulties was achieved in a friendly, joking manner.



Photo 6.9 The terrain steepens

‘My god what is going on here? It is getting pretty rough under foot; don’t go too fast will you, John, remember you have an old blind bugger attached to the back of your rucksack.’ (laughter)

11.00 am. *There were often one or two guide dogs brought along on the walks. However, the dogs are trained on pavements, so are of little use for practical guidance in a countryside setting. Instead, walks offer an important opportunity for guide dogs to be let off the lead. The dog’s enjoyment seemed to contribute to the owner’s and other group member’s enjoyment of the walk. For the dog this was a valuable free time in which to play, often an opportunity not afforded when being taken for a walk in town by their owner. The sound of the dog exploring, including her bell, also opens up areas to the owners and when let off the lead the dog becomes a collective focus for the walkers. Bell jangling, ‘Lucky’ the dog runs up and down the group and you hear people responding to her presence.*



Photo 6.10 'Lucky' the guide dog explores

'Oh hello Lucky, what are you up to? Come here'

12.00 pm *On the open, flat ground, walking pairs fall into their own rhythms and the group becomes more stretched out. People who have come for the exercise like to push on ahead so sighted guides are allocated to the back and front to accommodate this and they keep in contact via walky-talkies. As bodies begin to tire and hunger, thoughts turn to lunch.*



Photo 6.11 Falling into a rhythm

'We have just walked past the Bradfield Parish Boundary Stone, apparently Keith was saying it runs in a 40 mile circle' ... 'Oh right, does it go past the Lady Bower Reservoir then?'

12.30 pm *It is too wet and cold to sit down today so people grab a quick bite to eat standing up. One member has brought along homemade cake, this gets shared out amongst nearby members of the group. People congratulate her on her excellent baking and talk of other cakes and the temptations of cake. Many walkers seem to use the group as a form of exercise to help manage their weight.*



Photo 6.12 Sharing homemade cake

'Well, I shouldn't really be eating cake, but go on then...I put so much weight on, on that cruise I went on it's embarrassing and I can really feel it when I am out walking, you know?'

1.00 pm *We continue onwards down a country track. On this flatter terrain some members use their white canes in a similar way to how they would use them in the city– to help detect obstacles close to the ground. Jill the guide sees that other members have reached the stile; she explains to Sally that we will be getting to a stile shortly. Sally has been talking to me (there is no obligation to talk to the person you*

are being guided by). Sally goes on most of the walks and she always remembers a lot about what I have talked about on previous walks. I am always touched by this personal interest in me and feel bad that I won't be able to come out with the group once I have completed the research.



Photo 6.13 Using a white cane in conjunction with the sighted guide

‘So how is your nephew, Hannah? He must be two by now, is he?’

2.00 pm *We cross some fields and reach a gap in a dry stone wall which must be negotiated. Normally one guide goes each side of any obstacle like this in order to help people over safely. The guides took pride in their practical and descriptive guiding skills. The participants in the photo below are involved in the task at hand. They are ensuring the safety of others and participating in a shared orientation to the present moment. Perhaps such moments foster a sense of collectivity amongst group members.*



Photo 6.14 Passing over a stone wall 1

‘It is a narrow gap in the wall and then a step down so if you place your hands in front of you and then just take my hand’



Photo 6.14 Passing over a stone wall 2

2.30pm *After the gap in the wall it is an easy descent across the farmer’s field into the village where the pub awaits. There is a swing people’s step and a buoyant mood as they anticipate a rest. People comment that we have been lucky with the weather and that it has not been as muddy as they thought it would be. Thoughts also turn to the week ahead; some people do not want to get back, as then they will have to think about going to work on Monday.*



Photo 6.16 Descent across the fields

‘I can see the village now’....‘Well I think that justifies a pint.’

2.35 pm *John, himself visually impaired, holds the gate open, and as everyone come through, he shouts encouragement to them and congratulates them on their efforts.*



Photo 6.17 Gate opening

‘Well done, well done, almost there now. The pub is just down this hill’

3.00 pm *There is a warm afterglow of the walk still residing in us as we sit in the pub. We all share in a similar bodily feeling of tiredness, exposure to the elements and alcohol.*



Photo 6.18 In the pub

A typical walk in the British countryside?

What initially struck me as most interesting about a day's walk with the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group was that in many ways it was a very unremarkable event. Regular guides accustomed to the needs of walkers with blindness orientated their embodied and spoken practices to accommodate the blind walker so that the walk was conducted with a minimum of fuss. The SVIWG walking group is lead by sighted guides drawn from the Ramblers Association, and therefore, the structure of a day's walk also had much in common with other studies of walking groups in Britain (Jarvis 1997; Darby 2000; Edensor 2000; Lorimer and Lund 2003). Routes were still chosen for their scenic outlooks, the leader still followed an Ordnance Survey map and the conduct and dress of the walk was very similar to any other walking group that I observed when waiting each day at the Sheffield transport interchange. In fact, in many of the pictures I took it was hard to tell this was a blind and visually impaired walking group at all.

Just like other walks for leisure, the SVIWG walk was structured by physical needs such as thirst and hunger and constructed in order to generate and then satisfy those needs. The walking group was also a social space in which friendships and

relationships are forged and pursued outside the group, while a shared goal, the sharing of food and a common experience of the elements and terrain, served to cohere the group. The material and physical challenges of topography, mud, gates and stiles also produced a shared orientation to the present moment and a collective culture of assisting fellow walkers. Such features of the walk seemed to reproduce at least momentarily, the collective, democratizing and social levelling quality of walking practice celebrated by the Victorian rational recreation movements and recreation groups of the early twentieth century (discussed in Chapter 3).

Geographic, geologic and natural features in the landscape were also discussed in the group giving a sense of orientation, meaning and purpose and perpetuating a culture of 'outlook geography' found in earlier twentieth century walking group practice (Matless 1998). Walkers with blindness participated in these collective visual cultures of landscape (a topic discussed in Chapter 7).

Edensor identifies how walking in the British countryside is '...beset by conventions which constitute appropriate bodily conduct' (Edensor 2000, 83). A point comparable to other ethnographic findings of British walking group practice (Darby 2000; Lorimer and Lund 2003). It seems that these walkers with blindness were often involved in the reproduction of such conventions – from gate closing to gaiter wearing and posing for photos at trig points. Assistance of fellow walkers, discussion surrounding weather and appropriate clothing, and the amusement of me wearing trainers rather than boots, were all instances which reinforced what is 'generally accepted bodily conduct' amongst group members. Rules and 'conventions' for walking in the countryside tended to be perpetuated by walkers with blindness. While I wondered at the outset of this research if a route and stops planned may entail alternative non-visual considerations because of the group membership, blind walkers were led by sighted guides and this meant that in many ways their routes and practices were comparable to an average sighted walk in the English countryside. However, while this country walk may *look* very similar to any other group's country walks in Britain, there were also some quite distinct features of this group's walking practices. In fact, it seems that walkers with blindness and their sighted guides also forged new conventions of bodily conduct such as the 'C' Grip between walker and guide, the transition of walkers to the back of the rucksack for narrow paths and the careful supervision of stile crossings and wearing of reflective tabards.

Furthermore, for the walker with blindness the landscape comes about through a set of distinct experiences of visual disability. Firstly, *participants translated orientation and mobility skills learnt in the city into their country walking practices*. For example, many walkers used their usual white cane, a Leki walking pole or walking stick as an instrument for detection as well as stability and walking efficiency. Secondly, *walkers with blindness' sense of walking in the countryside emerged through and in relation to their city walking*. As Jenny explained to me,

...in day to day life walking around the streets with a long cane you don't build up any speed and you don't relax at all really it is quite a tense thing. But if you walk with somebody who is good at guiding you, you can get up a good pace and really relax and enjoy it⁶⁹. (p2)

For blind and visually impaired people, city walking is often constrained to known routes (Cook 1992; Butler and Bowlby 1997). Therefore, research participants often spoke of the relative sense of freedom that they got from walking in the countryside rather than the city and of how SVIWG and Vitalise present rare opportunities to walk guided over new terrain and over significant distances. Thus, the blind walker's experience of landscape must be understood as emerging in conjunction with their experiences and embodied practices in the urban environment (a point made in Chapter 3). Their experiences of walking in rural landscape also occurred in conjunction with the Guide Dogs who would come on the walks; dog and walkers co-constituted each other (cf. Laurier et al. 2006).

⁶⁹ Although compare the following interview quotes re: the freedom afforded by the sighted guides, Jim: *'I think I feel more of a sense of freedom in the city in an area I know - admittedly they are small - than I do in the country where I am totally dependant on a sighted guide... if I lost my grip on the guides rucksack or sleeve I would immediately have to stop and call to my guide and say, could you stop? I have lost your sleeve, because that in a sense is your life line, if you lose your sighted guide you could be in trouble.*

Paul: *'When you hold somebody's arm, you sort of switch off and ... it's brilliant, you know? Yeah so you can listen to the what is happening in the countryside, you can relax more, you know sort of sometimes you are tense thinking you might get a cut in the head or you could fall over something that someone has put in the way. It is just freedom really to walk unhindered with a guide'.*

A third distinct feature of SVIWG walking group practice is that *the opportunities for socialising that the walking group afford are in particular demand amongst people with blindness*. If you lose your sight in later life it can be a socially isolating experience (Hull 1990) and this group presents an opportunity to share those particular experiences of sight loss, share practical tips on coping and forge friendships with other group members. Fourthly, for walkers with blindness *the actual embodied practice of walking in the countryside differs for those who have limited or no sight*. Tactile-acoustic elements of the walking experience become particularly significant (Chapter 8) and the pace may slow over particularly rough or challenging terrain. Some walkers adopt a higher step and an accentuated heel-toe action in order to accommodate unseen obstacles. In Chapter 8 I address this in more detail and attend to how walkers reflect on these ‘foot skills’.

While it was not a primary goal of this research, it is worth noting how the body-landscape was also experienced in particular ways by the sighted guides. Amongst the sighted guides there is quite literally an ‘...embodiment of concern for the other with whom we enact the world’ (Varela et al. 1993, 247). This embodiment of concern became a habitual practice; a sort of seeing and thinking for two. It also struck me that in this shared orientation to helping those with blindness and visual impairment the guides generated a shared feeling of moral good. For in the mind of the charitable Rambler what could be more morally and physically healthy than helping someone less fortunate also go for a walk? This positive affective value of guiding practice circulated (Ahmed 2004). Guides, who were mainly retired, talked with other participants about how it was ‘nice to feel useful’ and ‘as if they were doing some good’, a point which relates to a whole other set of literature on the social benefits of volunteering (see for example Rochester 2006). The guides expected that in assisting the group that they were doing good and these expectations inevitably coincided with a reality of self-congratulation and of congratulation by the walkers with blindness. In this way a set of expectations coalesce to produce present moments of positive feeling for guides in the group. One slightly cynical reading of this scenario is that this is the able bodied use of those people with blindness to make them selves feel more able. Certainly there is an interdependence of sighted guides with blind walking participants and the guide becomes partly defined through this

guiding practice. Interestingly, this is a relationship which is often managed through the use of humour and laughter (a topic of Chapter 9).

Moments of intensity: Navigating steps

In SVIWG there is a dependency on sighted companions for the countryside is a particularly challenging and difficult environment for people without sight to enter into. The following film clip and accompanying commentary begins to illustrate one of these challenges. While there is no single 'correct' interpretation of the following series of images (Pink 2000, 127), I think the film clip helps to illustrate the ways in which the seemingly easy and habitual movement of navigating a set of steps becomes a struggle that requires intense concentration for someone who has recently lost their sight and how, as such, the country landscape can become a significant challenge for the newly blind walker. In this clip Pete, who has recently lost almost all his vision, is followed by Sally. Both have guides and both carry walking canes. Compare how Pete (beige trousers and walking stick) uses his walking stick to rest his weight upon and Sally (dark trousers and white cane) is adept at using her white cane with a light touch in order to detect objects, not requiring a walking stick for balance⁷⁰. Pete used to be a professional cyclist but without sight he has to deploy his aging but fit body in new ways. The once unconscious set of motor skills used to navigate a set of steps must re-enter consciousness as they must become re-learned without the use of vision and his sight loss renders the once everyday and habitual practice of navigating a set of steps a strange challenge.

⁷⁰ As mentioned in the methodology, due to the responsibility of guiding and the availability of the one video camera in the department, I have only had a limited opportunity to use the video camera. This 'footage' is chosen for its illustrative rather than aesthetic value.



Clip 1. The walkers set off up the steps and Pete comes into view top left with his walking stick.



Clip 2. Pete detects the step with his stick



Clip 3. Pete then hits the step with his foot



Clip 4. The foot gets stuck on the step as the rest of his bodyweight shifts forward onto the next step



Clip 5 and 6. Sally (Macular degeneration, some peripheral vision) comes into view top left.

Sally is translating the skills of using a white can in the city to negotiate the steps, co-ordinating the touch of her cane and her body movement and moving over the steps without requiring the detection of her feet. Sally also co-ordinates her body movements to accommodate Pete's slowed movements embodying a certain sensitivity to Pete's need for greater space and time to traverse the steps.





Clip 7. Sally continues to wait as Pete gets his foot up the step.



Clip 8. Sally taps the step with her cane again before proceeding. She seems engaged in a ‘flow of responsive activity’ (Thrift 2000a, 244) as she adeptly navigates the steps.

Conclusions

In the illustrated essay I have shown how walkers with blindness pass through the landscape in many similar ways to the sighted. However, I have also shown that for walkers with blindness there are some specific, conventions of walking practice, skills and habits to be adopted in order to become part of the walking group such as the 'C'grip between walker and guide. Moments of difficulty, such as that presented by steep terrain, a stile or steps are a typical feature of the walking group's day. They make the blind walker particularly aware of their dependence on sighted others and their physical limitations as well as their capabilities. However, they choose to be dependant on sighted guides in order to get the exercise, social interaction, fresh air and relative sense of freedom that the walking group and the material landscape afford. Rough topography, gates and steps bring the body up against itself so that body-landscape becomes a set of challenges to be worked through rather than a site of aesthetic contemplation more typical of a Romantic mode of landscape connoisseurship. Moments of difficulty are experienced by the whole group; they slow the group down, and as one participant put it, 'a stile takes twenty paces out of you'.

Previous research on blindness has drawn attention to the embodied and intuitive nature of blind non-visual perception (Hill 1985; Cook 1992; Hetherington 2003; Allen 2004); this work builds on the phenomenological insights of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Polanyi (1958). However, in the video clip I show how such perceptive skills are not necessarily innate in a person who has recently lost their sight. Rather, following sight loss the intuitive and habitual nature of perception must be re-learned. In fact, sight loss seems to make the embodied nature of perception a subject of reflective thought precisely because previously habitual skills that were once co-ordinated with vision need to be re-learned.

In the countryside specific skills of perceiving and moving the body with the guide's body, developing a high step which accommodates the rough terrain and co-ordinating the touch of the walking cane with the body must be developed. This renders blind walking in the countryside analogous to a skilled adventure sport such as climbing. For example, in Lewis' (2000) recent account of the 'climbing body' 'knowledge is grasped', 'hands are used for looking' and 'the climbing body

orientates itself through tactile navigation' (Lewis 2000, 77). Equally, those with blindness must learn to coordinate hand, cane and foot touch; a skill that by the end of my period with the group, Pete was much more adept at. These skills are forged not only through our immediate interaction with the material landscape, but with practice they also become sedimented in our neurology. That is to say, as we interact with our environment synaptic connections are forged (Chapter 4). The synaptic connections we use a lot become more numerous and better organized while connections which are infrequently used become weaker or lost for good (Morris and Fillenz 2003). Thus, when Pete learns to adapt his body to the loss of sight and to the specific challenges of the rural landscape, he was also altering his mind – for individual neurons in his brain become modified as he interacts with the world. Thus, the material topographic landscape literally serves to shape blind walking participants – not only their interactions and their muscles, but also their minds. Landscape does not reflect their identity; rather, the landscape 'engenders becoming' (Rose 2006, 548). Those with blindness exist in reciprocal 'becomings' with the landscape as new intuitive and embodied skills for interacting with the landscape without sight are created. There is a co-dependence of walkers and landscape and in walking through landscape both the embodied subject and their sense of landscape experience are constantly in formation. In subsequent chapters on visualization and touch I turn to some of these processes of formation in more detail.

Chapter 7 – Seeing and visualizing landscape



Photo 7.1 Members of SVIWG on top of Kinder Scout

Synopsis

As Chapter 1 began to show there is no such thing as absolute or pure vision, how and what we see as 'landscape' is shaped by history, culture and gender. However, what we see is also shaped by the actual individual, physical qualities of our faculty of sight. In this chapter, firstly, I explain different types of sight condition and how these conditions can effect the actual field of vision and thus, what may potentially be seen as landscape by a person who has a visual impairment. Secondly, I show how for walkers with blindness, vision is not just an individual embodied experience. Rather, vision in the landscape occurs as a collective practice/discourse often in conjunction with their sighted guides. In so doing this chapter begins to elucidate the complex 'body-brain-culture relations' (Connely 2002) through which sight/vision emerge through the landscape and I show how vision is often dependant on an intertwining of memory, the external world and the physical capacity of the eye. I also show how for visually impaired walkers in the Lakes and Peaks priority tended to be given to modes of looking and visualizing which enabled navigation rather than appreciation of the terrain. While sighted guides experience a sort of 'seeing for two' when guiding walkers in the landscape. These are distinct forms of 'landscape gaze' very different from the romantic and picturesque modes of looking at landscape discussed in Chapter 1.

Introduction

NRT and other theories of practice have encouraged a turn in geography to researching forms of 'embodied knowledge'. However, this has often involved an often implicit rejection of the visual gaze in favour of the body (McCormack 2002) and risks producing a new binary between vision and embodiment, where the body is understood as non-visual and sight is understood to be inherently dis-embodied and objectifying (Wylie 2003). In this chapter I avoid any such binary and I am particularly wary of associating people with blindness and visual impairment solely with proximal, non-visual forms of knowledge. Instead, I explore the variety of ways in which people with blindness and visual impairment 'see' in and with the landscape. For researching blindness does not preclude a focus on sight and visual culture. In fact, as Chapter 4 began to show, blindness may bring issues of sight,

visuality and representation to the fore. This is a point Althusser made when he wrote ‘...non-vision is inside vision, it is a form of vision and hence has a necessary relationship with vision’ (Althusser cited in Jay 1994, 328). In this chapter I attend to how blind and visually impaired walkers ‘see’ in and with landscape and their fellow walking participants and how certain versions of landscape come into being through the embodied presence of people with blindness.

Seeing involves much more than the physical faculty of sight. As phenomenological reflection and evidence from neuroscience show we cannot simply divide visual processes into a retinal object copy (sight) and later processing in the cortex (vision); rather it must be recognised that sight/vision is not only dependant on the physical properties of the eye but also intention, memory, language, habit and imagination (Gibson 1986; Heller 2000; Merleau-Ponty 2004). Therefore in thinking about sight we must approach it as a productive, intercorporeal and intersubjective process, inevitably bound up with other bodies and the conditions in the external world as well as ourselves. The precise nature of these processes and how they emerge in the context of blind and visually impaired walking groups will be addressed in this chapter. The following quote from visually impaired walker Sarah helps to put these ideas into context:

Sarah, macular degeneration,

I have a very tiny amount of peripheral vision, I can’t see depth so ...for instance yesterday there was a about a 30 foot drop but to myself it looks blackI don’t get any concept of it dropping down ... and there was this reservoir - the ‘Underbank reservoir’ and there were some trees after that, and if somebody explained that to me then I can see it in my mind’s eye, so their description forms a picture of my own – to form in my own imagination so I imagine I can see it. You see? So not being able to see well it doesn’t upset me, because a lot of guides say ‘oh I wish you could see it’ (laughs) and I think well just describe it and I can see it in my own way. So my imagination, from a description, is what I see.(p1-3)

Sarah, in talking about the limits of her sight and her imaginary vision begins to cover some key themes: first, it is important to note how the majority of walkers,

even some of those who referred to themselves as ‘blind’ had some residual vision, for example, Sarah has peripheral vision but has trouble with depth perception and as she puts it ‘sees just black’. Therefore in the first part of this chapter I devote space to the particular limits that certain common sight conditions impose on the physical faculty of sight. Secondly, seeing is also dependant upon time, memory and imagination, as Sarah puts it ‘my imagination...is what I see’. So Sarah simultaneously ‘sees’ black and her imagination, adding complexity to singular notions of sight/vision. Third, seeing is never wholly located in the individual subject. Sarah’s seeing is understood in relation to the landscape and is directed by sighted guides and elaborated through guides’ descriptions. We could even say that Sarah saw because the guides wanted her to see, therefore we cannot ignore the roles of the guides’ vision. The guides also compensate for another’s lack of physical sight through their own and thus experienced very particular visions of landscape – ‘seeing for two’. Finally, as a group we would become something of a spectacle to behold in the landscape. Groups of walkers would pause to watch us traverse a mountainside arm in arm or with each person we were guiding holding onto the backs of our rucksacks. As such the walking groups became the subjects to be seen in the landscape as well as enacting their own forms of sight/vision within the landscape. This chapter will reflect on these themes in turn, firstly attending to evidence from ophthalmology regarding the nature and extent of sight and the limits which certain sight conditions impose on the field of vision; then thinking through the role of memory and imagination in processes of sight/vision and then turning to experiences of congenital blindness and their relations with sight/vision.

Attending to evidence from neuroscience and opthamology

While attending to and representing first hand experiences of sight impairment and blindness is important, it is a claim of this thesis that we cannot understand the simultaneously embodied and socio-cultural process of sight/vision through traditional social research material alone. Rather, it is necessary to support empirical work through theoretical/empirical insights from neuroscience and opthamology, for while the testimony of blind and visually impaired people about sight maybe both interesting and persuasive there is also a danger that they may be naively accepted at face value (Chapter 4). As this chapter will proceed to show people’s use of terms

such as 'picturing' and 'minds eye' do not necessarily indicate accurately the conditions and practice of sight/vision, rather, such language may more accurately indicate the common discursive limits which inevitably impose themselves upon first hand description of experience (see Harrison 2006)

We can certainly 'see more than we can say' for there is an unconscious quality to seeing which is impossible to know through reported experience. We apprehend and consciously reflect upon only a limited proportion of visual and other sensory imagery which reaches our brains. Firstly, this is because certain imagery maybe so fleeting that it may pass below the threshold of conscious awareness; anything which occurs within less than a half second duration may not enter our consciousness (Norretranders 1999). Secondly, a filtration of visual imagery also occurs at the level of consciousness because an incredible amount of imagery from a variety of sensory sources is generated in any one moment and there is only a '...relatively small window of mind in which images can be made conscious' (Damasio 1999, 319). Thus, each time we look and move the brain acts to filter visual and other sensory imagery depending on the activity. This means that amongst the enormous amount of information which reaches our brains only a small proportion is consciously reflected upon and utilised.

This unconscious quality of seeing can be demonstrated here by two examples from case studies of the effects of sight loss: 'Blindsight' and 'Charles Bonnet Syndrome'. Blindsight's paradoxical name refers to the capacity of those people with cortical blindness to perform visually without acknowledging that performance. Cortical blindness is where the eyes and optic nerves remain intact but there is damage to the visual cortex through accident or stroke resulting in the patient being unable to see (Sekuler and Blake 2002). Research into this sight condition shows that subjects can make accurate orientation responses when a light is flashed, despite reporting not being able to see it. Some people can also detect colour or objects. Researcher Schiffman concludes from his study of this phenomenon that 'because blindsight behaviour occurs without any conscious awareness, it is reasonable to assume that subcortical brain mechanisms mediate visual information at an unconscious level' (Schiffman 2001, 113).

The second example is Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS). In the experience of this syndrome people who have lost their sight experience realistic visual hallucinations while awake. During wakefulness, the brain usually ignores internally generated visual activity and attends to environmental sensory stimulation. However, if there is sensory deprivation, the brain may attend to internal and external activities simultaneously, resulting in visual hallucinations – CBS (Jacob et al. 2004). The condition tends to occur in people who have lost their sight later on in life because the brain has trouble readjusting to the sudden sensory deprivation. One in ten people with vision loss are thought to experience such conditions; however the reported experience of the condition maybe lower than the actual experience due to the stigma associated with hallucinatory experience (Teunisse et al. 1995). Social isolation and a lack of alternative sensory stimulation is thought to contribute to the experience of this syndrome (Menon et al. 2003).

While no direct questions were asked about this syndrome none of the walkers voluntarily mentioned experiencing Charles Bonnet hallucinations either out on walks or in the home. This maybe due to the ‘stigma’ associated with the condition (Menon et al. 2003) or the fact that the alternative social sensory stimulation provided by being a walking group participant meant that the experience of such hallucinations was less likely to occur. However, the condition remains of note for it indicates the way in which the brain is not simply a representational or mirror like system but rather a device which becomes accustomed to certain patterns of sensory stimulation. This accustomization, or habit of the brain, is comparable to the experiences of patients with phantom limb syndrome who get sensation in a limb despite conscious intellectual acknowledgement that it is missing. This is evidence that below our intellectual control the mind is organizing itself. Such observations undermine notions of free will or that we have complete control and knowledge of our actions and intentions; giving further justification to a research approach in social science which also takes evidence from neuroscience seriously (see also, Connely 2002).

Sight conditions and how they affect what is seen

There are around 157,000 people on the register of blind people and 155,000 on the register of partially sighted people in England (Department of Health 2003) and the ways in which these people experience their visual impairment or blindness are extremely diverse. Most people who are registered blind or partially sighted have some residual vision (Department of Health, 2003) and it is an under recognised element of blind and visually impaired experience that remaining vision varies considerably in nature and quality and can be put to a diversity of uses (Kleege 1998). Thus, while it is not only a person's current physical faculty of sight which determines a person's openness to and experience of sight/vision, the varying limits that differing visual impairments place on the field of vision still remain an important factor to consider when thinking through walker's with blindness' experiences of landscape. The limits to a person's vision are also of significance not only to the person with the visual impairment but to the person who is guiding them and helping to compensate for any lack. Thus, before I address different *ways of seeing* with and in the landscape (in the second part of this chapter) it is important to distinguish between different types of sight condition and how these conditions can effect the actual field of vision.

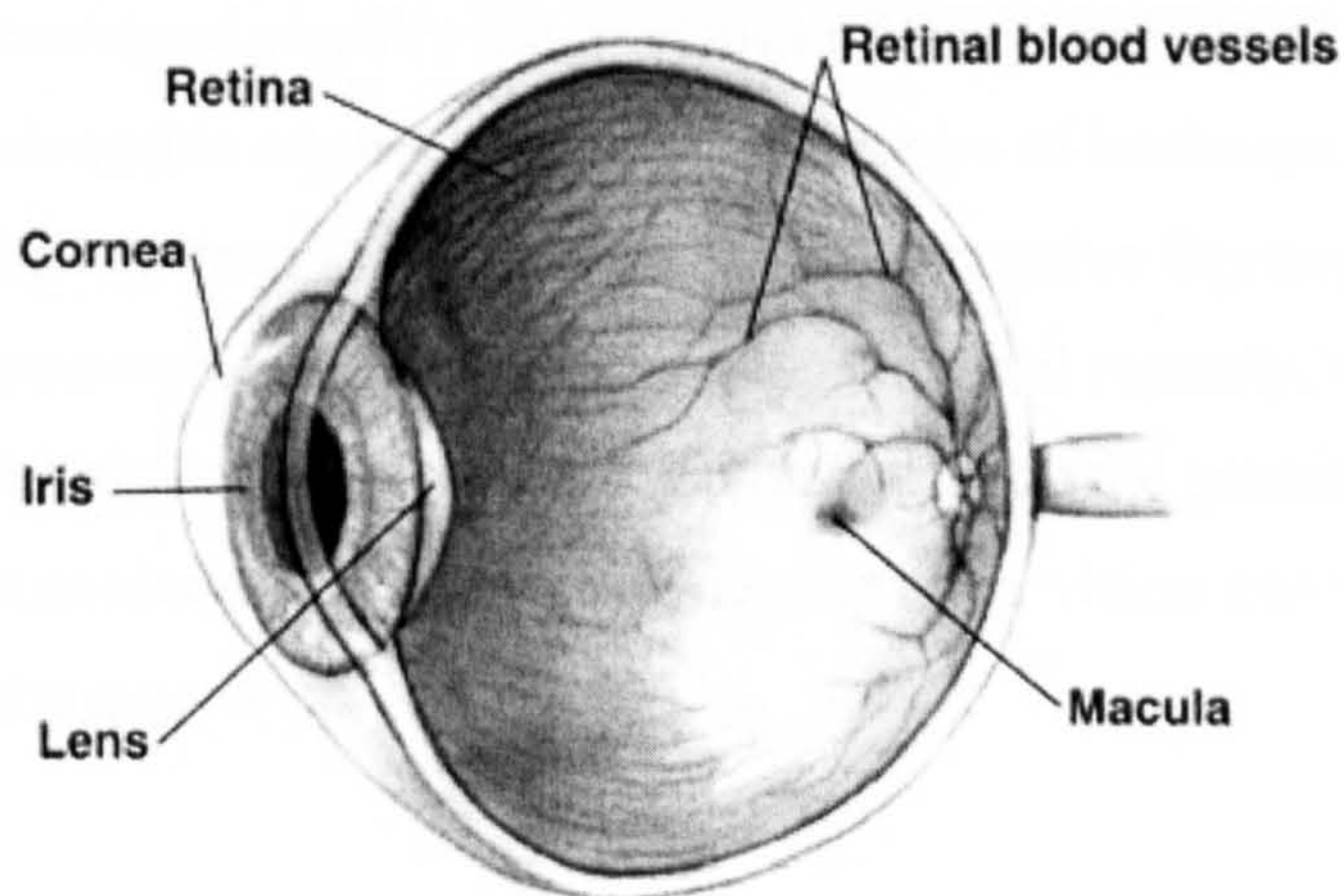


Figure 7.1 Anatomy of the eye

The majority of the people who participated in this research were visually impaired or had age onset blindness rather than being congenitally blind (that is blind since birth) (Appendix B). What can be seen through such residual sight varies depending on the medical condition, its stage of progression and the properties of the environment through which seeing takes place. The following paragraphs focus on some of the most common sight conditions experienced by walking group members; such as macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma and posterior vitreous detachment.

Age related macular degeneration is the most common cause of visual impairment in people over sixty and a number of the research participants, including Sarah quoted above experienced this condition. The macular is a small area at the centre of the retina (see figure 7.1) and in age related macular degeneration the cells of this area are damaged and stop working. This sight condition rarely leads to total blindness and most people with age related macular degeneration retain some peripheral vision. In the early stages central vision maybe blurred or distorted. The Painter Ann Roughton, featured in the RNIB publication 'Painting from a new perspective' (RNIB 2006) painted a landscape which includes the sight of her own macular degeneration (see figure 7.2). While there were a number of landscape paintings in the RNIB book of visually impaired and blind artists 'Painting from a new perspective' (RNIB 2006). I was particularly struck by Ann's painting for it conveyed visually the workings of vision and visual impairment. The painting fits alongside other images that researchers of landscape have utilised in order to demonstrate divergences from the normative framework that viewing the British countryside as landscape has tended, until recently, to imply (Kinsman 1995; Nash 1996; Tolia-Kelly 2006). Commenting on the painting she explains how she sees her macular degeneration, how it effects her vision and how her vision changes during the day:

Ann Roughton, Painter

My eye condition is age related macular degeneration and it affects me early in the morning because when I look up at the ceiling of the bedroom I get a black cloud with sort of frilly edges, sort of fringed and it looks rather like

Australia in shape very often. And then as the day wears on my cloud, which obscures my central vision takes on the general tone of what I am looking at so I can always see round about the edges in full colour I am glad to say because I really am very colour conscious.

(RNIB, 2006)

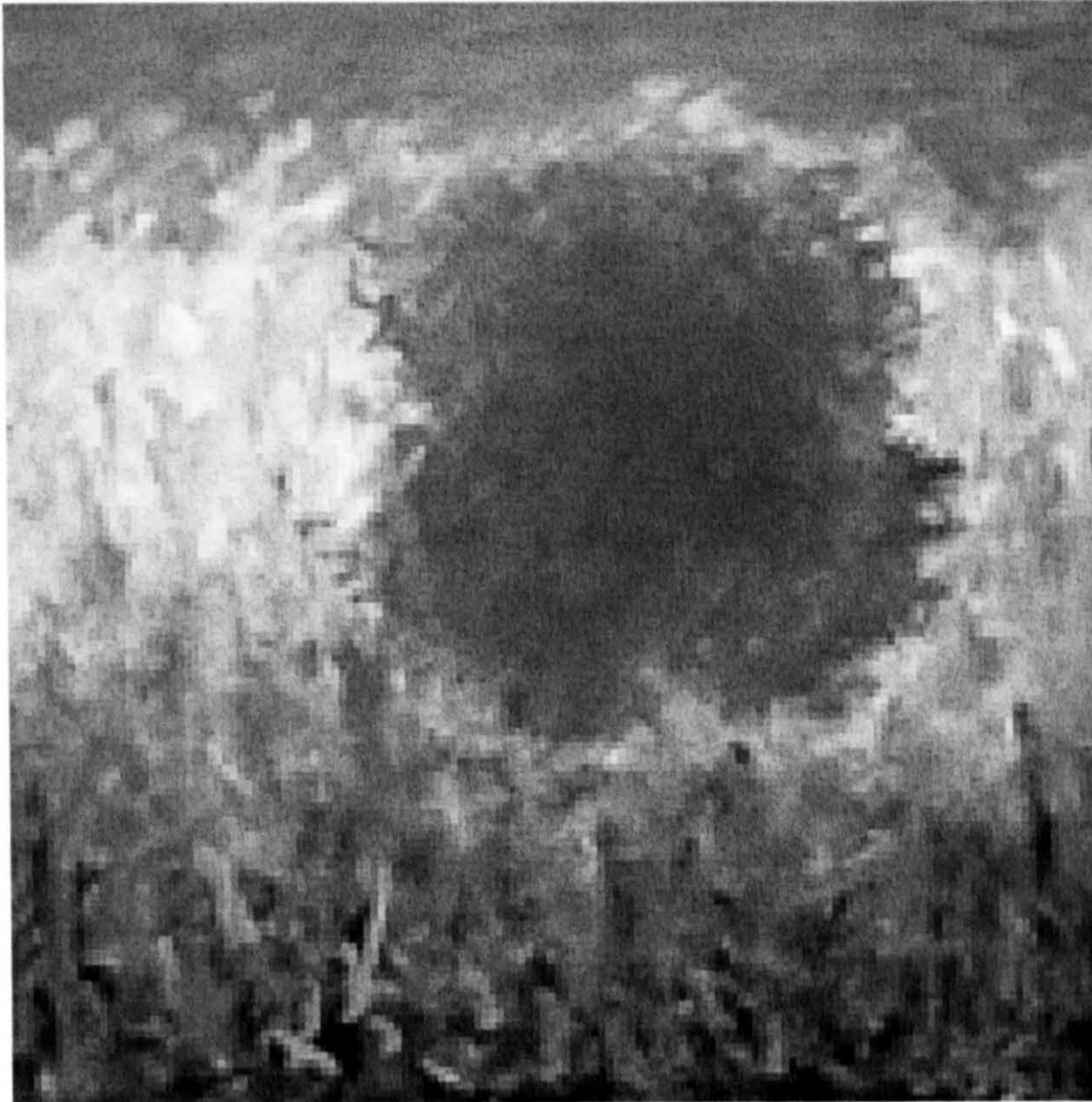


Figure 7.2 Morning Sight, Ann Roughton (RNIB, 'Painting from a new Perspective', 2006)

Ann's comment begins to indicate how her sight and the sight of her impairment vary depending on the time of day, weather and light conditions. Her vision is not only 'her own' but is dependant upon and constituted by the surrounding environment. As Ann puts it, her macular degeneration '...takes on the general tone of what I am looking at'. While in her painting 'Morning Sight' the actual impairment is seen as a landscape of sorts; a phenomena to be studied, objectified and fixed. A phenomenon which also changes according to the light conditions, just like the landscape in front of her. In this way Ann's macular degeneration quite literally blurs the distinction between the subject and the landscape. Ann's painting reveals the ambiguous status of subject and object. In her painting neat distinctions between the external world and the body become quite literally blurred; a clear

antidote to the binarisms of subject and object, seer and seen which pervade the Cartesian spectatorial epistemology central to many theories of the subject and landscape (Wylie 2002). Through this seeing of vision itself the objectivity of the visible world is called into question. Such ambiguity of subject and object is an interpretation of vision also found in Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work 'The visible and the invisible' (2004). While Merleau-Ponty had long recognised touch as having qualities which blur subject/object boundaries, and even uses the example of the touch of the 'blind man's' cane (1962), in his later work he also develops a new conception of vision as a 'chiasm' or crossing-over between subjective and objective existence. As he writes:

It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible...And yet it is not possible that we blend into it, nor that it passes into us, for then the vision would vanish at the moment of formation, by disappearance of the seer or of the visible...the gaze itself envelops...clothes...with its own flesh.
(Merleau-Ponty 2004, 248)

This touching, immersed quality of vision remains a less well recognized element of Merleau-Ponty's work than his earlier work on the phenomenology of perception (Vasseleu 1998) yet it is vital to understanding vision as more than simply a taken for granted distant objectifying function. Ingold (2000) distils Merleau-Ponty's message further when he writes,

...it is the very familiarity of our experience, of that openness to the world sensed as light, that causes it to hide from us. So busily preoccupied are we with all the things that vision reveals to us that we forget the foundational experience upon which it rests. The process of seeing in light is swallowed up by its products, objects of sight...the joy and astonishment of the discovery that 'I can *see*' gives way to the mundane indifference of 'I see *things*'. The message of Merleau-Ponty is that we need to reverse this perspective, to recover the sense of vision that is original to our experience of the world, and that is a precondition for its objectification. (265)

While for many there is a familiarity and taken for granted nature to seeing things, sight conditions render seeing strange. Certain sight conditions also have changeable qualities which may vary during the day and/or take on the qualities of the surrounding environment, for example, people with glaucoma tend to experience hazy vision in the morning. In glaucoma the optic nerve is damaged at the point where it leaves the eye, early vision loss is most often in the shape of an arc a little above and/or below the centre when looking straight ahead. If untreated this area spreads both outwards and inwards and ultimately the centre of the field maybe affected, tunnel vision may result and all sight maybe lost. Such tunnel vision makes walking on rough terrain difficult for a person with glaucoma maybe able to see the horizon they cannot see what is under their own feet.

Another common sight condition which was experienced by a number of the walkers was cataracts. A cataract is a clouding of the lens which can cause blurry sight. For people with cataracts sunlight or other bright light may become dazzling and color vision may become washed out or faded (Royal National Institute of the Blind 2006). A good day for people with this sort of sight condition is one which is overcast, while a bright and clear day is much more difficult to cope with. Monet had cataracts and the evidence for this can be found in his impressionist landscape paintings. Monet's cataracts began around 1905 where, at the age of 65 he experienced changes in his perception of colour, no longer perceiving colours with the same intensity. Cataracts tend to absorb light, de-saturate colours, and make the world appear more yellow. Monet's paintings are thought to reflect this change in vision shifting towards muddy yellow and purple tones (Coldham et al. 2002). In the paintings of the Japanese bridge at Giverny (Figure 7.3) we can see how the scene painted changes significantly between 1899 – 1920. While Monet at times found it frustrating that he was not able to represent the colours he once saw (Coldham et al. 2002) perhaps ultimately his paintings make a more interesting point. For example, the art historian Marrinan in a lecture on the topic of Monet's sight argues that:

Monet's diminished sight opened up a new vista for his art, one in which memory and the unseen play a more important role than the perceptions of direct experience.... we must learn to see these last pictures of his garden at Giverny not as increasingly confused by his inability to see clearly, but as

pictures in which Monet's memory traces the site he had planted and tended and lived with so long – the paths, the plants and the waterways of his garden – came to replace the ever more fragile images of his failing eyes. (Marrinan 2001).



Figure 7.3 The Japanese footbridge, Claude Monet 1899



Figure 7.4 The Japanese footbridge, Claude Monet 1920-1922

The paintings of both Roughton and Monet show us some of the different possible affects of visual impairment and the way in which visual impairment renders sight itself visible⁷¹. Their work illustrates the important point that seeing resides neither entirely in the subjective observer at a particular point in time, nor in the external world. In so doing they disrupt the notion of an isolated subject gazing upon and able to objectively assess 'the landscape' and challenge sighted confidences in how the world 'is' and how the world will present itself to us over time.

Looking at landscape

So far it has been important to note the variety of visual impairments and how common conditions such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and cataracts vary over time and according to light and weather conditions. These observations destabilize any singular or polarised notions of sight and blindness and help to reveal the way in which sight is dependant on an intertwining of memory, the external world and the physical qualities of the eye.

Another important thing to note about sight is that it is dependant upon movement. The eye does not operate like a camera. Even when you try to keep your eyes still small random muscle contractions keep the eyes moving. These movements tend to be so small we are unaware of them but they are important for seeing. Thus eyes are moving all the time in order to give us a continuous sense of the world. In fact experiments have shown that if the eye is held completely still participants have difficulty with recognition and depth perception (Sekuler and Blake 2002, 71). This means the fixed point gaze of an observer is an impossible fiction, for sight emerges from our immersion in the world and requires movement both of the eyeball and the body for actualization and understanding.

Seeing is dependant upon actions, body movement and intentions as well as the motility of the eyeball (Gibson 1986). The visible landscape which we register and reflect upon depends on what we are doing. The way in which conscious seeing was directed and intentional was an issue which was clearly discussed by research

⁷¹ Another famous example of this is the garden designer, writer and embroiderer, Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) who had severe myopia (nearsightedness) a condition thought to be important factor in her approach to border design.

participants. For those people with residual sight, when out walking this sight was often concentrated on navigation and safety. There was little time or 'spare sight' to be spent dwelling on beauty, particularly when traversing the steep and slippery hillsides of the Lake District or the muddy woodland paths of the Peaks. For example Ellen explains how her progressive macular degeneration leaves her with residual vision which she refers to as her 'walking vision' (illustrated in Figure 7.4):

Well my brother has the same condition so it must be congenital...It starts with a deterioration of the retina ... in each case – my brother and myself – it started at about the age of 15 with the loss of macular vision; the reading vision. But unlike macular degeneration it continues to degenerate into all parts of the retina...Most of my vision that I have left is peripheral vision which is walking vision; the vision you get from the sides of your eyes. So if I look at you now (turns head to face me front on) you just don't exist, you go into a blackness a blankness, but if I look a bit more I can vaguely see your legs. So this gives me what I call walking vision, this continues to deteriorate; it has been deteriorating for fifty-three years...we don't know what the cause of it is but it is deterioration of the retina, starting with the central portion which is the reading portion. You can see a bus coming but you can't see where it is going. Though nowadays I can hardly see the bus coming.
(Ellen, p1)

Ellen describes her vision in terms of how it is put to use. She emphasises the little sight she has left and how that is useful for walking and seeing the bus, revealing the active, directed and embodied nature of visual perception. Insights often attributed to Gibson (1986, originally published 1979) and his 'ecological theory of environmental perception'. Gibson critiques the standard approach to visual perception which assumes that visual perception begins in the mind after sensory input reaches the visual cortex. Instead he emphasises how the body's movements and actions are integral to vision, arguing that seeing can only be understood as an active process in a dynamic world (Gibson 1986). He criticizes the circular reasoning of input and inference models of sensory perception suggesting that,

...explanations of perception based on sensory inputs fail because they all come down to this: In order to perceive the world one must already have ideas about it. Knowledge of the world is explained by assuming that knowledge of the world exists...the fallacy lies in the circular reasoning (Gibson 1986, 304)



Figure 7.4 “Walking Vision”: Some walkers had macular degeneration which left them with peripheral vision. Ellen referred to this as her ‘Walking vision’ where you can see what is beneath your feet but not what is ahead.

Gibson notes how conscious visual perception is inevitably bound up with our movements and actions. In fact this is a reiteration of an argument made by philosophers William Jameson and Henri Bergson (Connely 2002). What was important to Ellen was the vision which remained and how that could be of use to her in her day to day life including her walking activities. The way in which people with visual impairment’s residual vision was put to use, varied significantly and depended upon the nature of their visual impairment. For Ben whose visual impairment was the result of being hit by a car it was actually easier to look at the ground when walking for he experienced double vision at a distance which was very confusing when moving along. In fact too much movement seemed to make it difficult for him to see. As he explains to me,

Hannah:

...and is it a time when your thoughts wander?

Ben:

no not really I just get on with it man, because I look to the floor most of all to see where I am going, I am not looking at the hills, I look at the hills now and again, like everyone does but I am mainly looking at the floor in front of me. That is mainly what I do in Manchester anyway..., because when you look up and you have got double vision and you can see two of everything it is confusing...

(p2)

These quotes from Ben and Ellen begin to illustrate how looking, even in the supposedly highly codified and represented locations of the Lake District and Peak District is not necessarily directed by guidebooks, viewpoints or a Romantic inheritance of landscape connoisseurship (Andrews 1989), rather, looking may depend on the activity and the nature and extent of an individual's sight. Thus, looking at landscape emerges through our embodied movement as well as previous systems of knowing the landscape.

The making of vision: memory and imagination

The quote from Sarah at the start of this chapter began to show how sight is about more than just the physical act of looking and seeing, it is about imagination and memory as well. Some psychological and autobiographical accounts of blindness suggest that in losing sight people 're-orientate' around their other senses and utilise visual imagery less and less after the loss of sight (Hollins 1985; Hull 1990; Michalko 1999). However many research participants seem to suggest that vision and visualizing remained important to them even when they had lost almost all sight. Certainly the activity in the brain is linked to the conditions of our embodiment in seemingly habitual ways as the earlier discussion of hallucinations experienced by those with age onset sight loss has shown. Participants described how visualization occurred on the basis of partially sighted people's memories of places once seen, guide's verbal descriptions, the small pieces of visual information they could detect from any residual vision and the set of tactile/acoustic and kinaesthetic feelings of

what was around them. For many of those who had lost their sight, evoking a visual world remained a useful orientation and mobility strategy, a source of memories and a rich psychological experience. Ellen explains how she ‘envisages’ places using her residual vision, guides’ descriptions, the technical extension of vision through her monocular and her memories of places once seen.

Hannah:

...and do you try to build up a picture of places either through the guide’s interpretations or your own?

Ellen:

Well you must remember of course that I have got years of memory, and I may see an outline of hills and then use my monocular to give a bit more detail and depth to the hill – I like big spaces obviously, looking out across mountains and big valleys...and people will say like oh there are three ridges there, one behind the other, and I can envisage that – I don’t see it. But I can envisage it, because I have got a great deal of visual memory.

(p3)

Ellen’s sight/vision is actualized through the technology of her monocular, the environment, description and past memories. Her seeing is therefore a composite of external and internal stimuli from present and past moments. This understanding of mental processes is consistent with an enactive model of thought and imagery where ‘...brain regions respond not only to events in the world but also, proprioceptively, to cultural habits, skills, memory traces, and affects mixed into our muscles, skin, gut, and cruder brain regions’(Connely 2002, 36). Understandings of landscape scenery were also informed by books and wider learning about the significance of vision and visuality in rural and mountainous areas. For example, Greg who had sight until the age of 2 ½ years old points out,

Greg:

...when going up the hills the main sensation for me is one of going up high. But I do have an idea of how when going up high things look small from a great height.

Hannah:

Is that from visual memory or others descriptions?

Greg:

I think it is from my imagination, from books I have read, erm so I can imagine looking up at something in the distance.

(P1)

While for Sarah who had only seen colour prior to losing her sight entirely she describes how she visualizes within the limits of her past visual experience of colour,

Hannah:

... do you try to visualize things around you?

Sarah:

Yes, but because I have never been able to see actually what it looks like... for me when I try to visualize I try to visualize the colour because this is what I could see, you know? And shadows, for example, all these things are interesting for me because they are something I can associate with...if somebody shows me a flower, err [...] there are two things I want to know immediately; whether it has a scent and what colour it is. I know immediately how it smells but also colour I wish I could see the colour.

Hannah:

Do you ever feel like you are missing out on anything? [...] or that

Sarah:

Yes well people today like when they were saying, people they were describing. You know I try to imagine like when someone is saying it is like a velvety green. You know I love to hear the description when someone is describing say the green but I knew I was missing exactly the same as if I could see. Or like when Hugh was describing the sun on water and the light. I

love it. But I know some people don't like to know, you know? Because they have their own ideas anyway, but I do like to know.

(P4)

Sarah describes how it is possible to use guide's descriptions in order to help her reinvolve some past visual experience and imagine places which are seen. Using visual memory to reinvolve sight which has been lost through visual impairment may be hard to imagine for a fully sighted person; however, this process is not so radically different from how the average fully sighted person sees. Even eyes considered normal do not produce a complete picture in a single glance. There is a blind spot in the visual field which is attributed to the optic disk which contains no photoreceptors. If we try to find our blind spot we are not left with a hole in the visual field rather the gap is 'filled in' by the colour of its surrounds. There is a completion of vision across the blind spot through interpolation and memory (Sekuler and Blake 2002, 71). Thus, for all of us sight/vision is dependent on memory and imagination. There is no such thing as perfect vision for we never completely see instantaneously what is 'actually there'. In this way sighted people and visually impaired people a more similar experience of vision than is commonly thought.

Mental imagery and the limits of articulation

What remains hard to distil from participants' verbal descriptions of 'mental imagery', the 'minds eye' and 'picturing thing's is the extent to which these terms actually refer to visual pictures in the mind and the extent to which they are simply a turn of phrase, located in a collective sighted regime of truth about the world; a truth which at times I have unwittingly perpetuated for want of a better word than visualize or picture⁷². The picture theory of imagery and thought is deeply

⁷² Of course it is also important to note how I am implicated in the very re-production of these categories of thought. While my main interview question on this topic was; *'I am hoping you could describe for me how you get a sense of the areas you walk through'*. Other prompts and responses which I used meant that at times I ended up locating my questions within a discourse of picturing things and visualizing. At times this became a source 'black humour'. For example, Derek explains to me how imagery based on past visual memory means that the imagined landscapes of those who have lost most of their sight maybe based on 'out of date', idealistic or partial memories.

H- Do you try to visualize? Like colours or anything?

entrenched in our language. For example, 'minds eye', 'having a picture of things' and 'picturing' are just a few of the words in the which equate imagery with thought; but in fact picture based theories of mental imagery may simply be indicative of a prioritization of vision in Western thought and '...the almost irresistible grip that our subjective impressions have on our inclination to accept certain kinds of theories' (Pylyshyn 2004, 581).

Researchers in geography often proceed with relatively little critical reflection on the assumption that mental imagery is visual and consists solely of inner pictures. As Rodaway points out 'The mental map or visual image analogy of information stored in the brain has been particularly influential in geography.' (Rodaway 1994, 18) Previous geographic research with blind and visually impaired people has tended to proceed with the assumption that they will necessarily utilise and act upon 'cognitive maps' or 'inner pictures' (Kitchin et al. 1997; Jacobson 1998; Blades et al. 1999). However a study which looked at the stated vividness of mental imagery and it's relationship to memory found that the only measure which showed a relationship to imagery in the study was called 'social desirability'; this was meant to be an indicator of the extent to which subjects attempt to be obliging and give socially acceptable answers! (Baddeley 1999). Therefore when participants talk of the 'minds eye' and 'visualizing' it is important to reflect upon why they might use these terms *and* the processes in the brain which might correspond to these words. This is a point at which neuroscience and culture clearly intersect. For Neuroscientist Damasio (1999) the impression that we experience mental pictures, is a subjective impression which has little correspondence to the neuro-scientific reality,

...the images you and I see in our minds are not facsimiles of the particular object, but rather images of the interactions between each of us and an object
...There is no picture of the object being transferred from the object to the retina and from the retina to the brain...since you and I are similar enough

D- Well yeah ... for probably 29 years my sight was reasonable, although short, so I have a good appreciation of colours and erm shapes and just seeing generally. So yeah I do try to 'picture things up', although I may get it wrong, might be better the way I see them! (both laugh) There are some things I forget [...]. I mean quite recently I was reminded that there were clouds in the sky and I don't know what it was but I had totally forgotten what fluffy white clouds look like floating across the sky...something happened, or something was said and it kind of brought it back to me. But I had forgotten about that, I thought the sky was either grey- as in cloudy- or blue. (Both laugh) (p2)

biologically to construct a similar enough image of the same thing, we can accept without protest the conventional idea that we have formed the picture of some particular thing. But we did not. (321)

It would appear that to ‘picture things’ may in fact refer to a whole bundle of thoughts and sensations which help us to imagine being somewhere at a particular point in time and this bundle of thoughts and sensations will not necessarily correspond directly to the external environment. Thus while images may still be understood as the ‘*currency of our minds*’ (Damasio 1999, 319) these images are not just visual. Rather, the concept and experience of imagery may refer to patterns in any of the sensory modalities. For example, when Damasio writes of imagery he is referring to,

....mental patterns with a structure built with the tokens of each of the sensory modalities – visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and somatosensory. The somatosensory modality (the word comes from the Greek soma which means “body”) includes varied forms of sense: touch, muscular, temperature, pain, visceral, and vestibular. The word “image” does not refer to visual experience alone, and there is nothing static about images either. The word also refers to sound images such as those caused by music or the wind...In short, the process we come to know as mind when mental images become ours as a result of consciousness is a continuous flow of images many of which turn out to be logically interrelated. The flow moves forward in time, speedily or slowly, orderly or jumpily, and on occasion it moves along not just one sequence but several. (318)

Damasio replaces a representational conception of imagery and thought with an idea of unfolding multi-sensory action in context. He also reinforces an idea noted at the start of this chapter that we may experience more than one image at any one point in time. Thus while blind and visually impaired people refer to the mind’s eye and picturing things this may not refer to directly to their sensory-cognitive experience, rather it may simply refer to the limits of common linguistic abilities to describe mental imagery.

As we have noted at the start of this section and in Chapter 2 the picture theory of mental imagery is deeply entrenched in our thought and in geographical approaches to visually impaired people's way finding and spatial orientation abilities. In fact there seems to be a dangerous assumption in some of the educational and orientation and mobility literature that blind and visually impaired people *should* be able to visualize and develop mental pictures (Kennedy and Heywood 1980; Kennedy et al. 1992; Blades, et al. 1999). While this visual imperative may be endorsed by the majority of blind and visually impaired people who have at one time or another experienced seeing or have some residual vision, it exists in contradiction with many congenitally blind people's reported experiences. For example, in my research a notion that we should all experience inner 'mental pictures' was a source of frustration for congenitally blind Ella:

Hannah:

So have you ever been encouraged at blind school or anything like that to build up pictures of things?

Ella:

Oh absolutely, something that they used to say that and I just think it was a real denial of culture, my culture as somebody who is blind was being told 'don't touch it makes you look so blind' but well I am, and you know that's not a negative it is just part of who I am it is part of my identity as a person you know? and why make that into a negative? Why can't I relish the things about my disability that I think are a positive you know? Instead of seeing it as a negative? (P3)

An absence of vision

While for many people with partial sight or sight loss re-invoking the experience of sight is stated as being extremely important, for those who have never seen this is not necessarily stated to be the case. Ella and Jonathan, both in their late twenties and blind since birth did not possess any physical faculty of sight and never had any experience of an image from the external world projected onto their 'visual cortex' through the physical faculty of sight. Therefore their disposition and preliminary

perceptual memory had been left uninfluenced by any physical experience from eyes. Ella and Jim both relayed an experience of blindness to me as a total absence of sight and a difficulty in relating to sightedness.

Jim:

... sometimes, well quite a lot actually, I do wish that in some time in my life I had actually seen, just so I would know what all this sighted stuff was all about. As it is if anyone is sort of talking about colour or anything I just sort of have to switch off.... with some blind people you can actually draw on their hand moving a finger around on the palm ...to draw a certain shape and people who have seen can actually interpret that as a picture or an image. But if someone does that to me that is something I can't actually do because in order to do that you need to have seen, you need to have a concept of what an image is. You see? (p3)

Ella:

....you know how you distinguish between lightness and darkness which suggests it is a visual experience, whereas like I don't see anything so I can't distinguish. So I would use like sound – you know are the birds singing yet? Ok well that means it is morning or are only a few birds singing oh well that means it is getting quite dark so it is time to shut the curtains or whatever. Things like that so I always use audible clues to kind of distinguish how light or dark it is. (p4)

Both Jim and Ella had a large resource of propositional knowledge about sight and first hand experience of what role seeing plays in people's lives and how it operates as a metaphor in culture and language. This is demonstrated by Ella in her example of shutting the curtains and in Jim's paradoxical line '... you need to have a concept of what an image is. You see?' However Ella and Jonathan also emphasise their unique blind perspective on things and emphasized the priority they give to elements of the environment which they could access themselves, rather than being overly concerned with what other people could see. As Ella explains,

Ella:

...I think because I have always been blind and because I am not particularly hung up on, I don't know really, on, on kind of the sighted aspects of things err I think that I sought of prioritise things that I can access, without having to try. So you know I will kind of use sound to orientate myself or , or sound to sort of relish a walk or to enjoy it or whatever, so as I said I like river walks I quite like woodland walks as well, because you get a variety of wildlife and things, I love walks along seashores, I love the sea I find it quite wild and sort of quite passionate. (p2)

Jim:

...I am very interested in what you are actually going over, rather than what you can see what's in your line of sight really and once I have gone over it is irrelevant from my own perspective really. So the name Rivington for example if a sighted person heard it could conjure up all kinds of images, they would realise there are reservoirs in that area for example, they'd think about an old tower on a hill, they'd think about erm some gardens called the Chinese gardens which were built there all that's part of the landscape for them, but none of that would really appeal to me, it would really be just well how is it going to affect me? What am I going to walk over? (p6)

Jim and Ella's accounts of blindness differ substantially from the previous accounts of sight loss I have referred to, for they tend to place greater emphasis on aspects of the environment they could access themselves without being able to see. In this way, their interpretations of blindness parallel the autobiographical accounts by Hull and Michalko cited in the previous chapters, where blindness is understood to involve an orientation around non-visual sensations (Hull 1990; Michalko 1999). As Jim put it '...once I pass over it, it is irrelevant from my own perspective really.' Unlike many of their fellow walkers who had lost their sight in later life both Ella and Jim were clearly aware of the potential difference which blindness makes and proud to place an emphasis on these differences.

It is hard to distil the extent to which this emphasis on the difference which blindness makes is a product of biology, culture or personal history. Both Jim and Ella went to blind schools and were very aware of disabled rights issues and this appeared to give

them both a background history of shared understanding without sight amongst their fellow blind friends at school and the confidence to talk of blindness as difference. Recent research lends support to the idea that significant cortical re-organization occurs in people who are born blind. This reorganization means that the visual cortex ‘lights up’ when congenitally blind people touch Braille, yet the same phenomena does not occur in blindfolded sighted subjects asked to do the same task (Heller 2000). If correct, this means that blindness involves unique ways of knowing which maybe particularly hard to grasp for the fully sighted.

Relations with sighted guides

Sighted guides were often very concerned about what they should and should not describe to the people they were guiding and uninitiated guides often sought prescriptive guidelines regarding the amount of visual description that a guide should give someone who is blind. However, beyond simple practical guidelines such as indicating ‘step up’ ‘step down’, ‘overhanging branches’ etc. no such prescriptions can be made. Each person with a visual impairment or blindness needed and wanted to know a varying amount of visual information about their surrounding environment, while some took an interest in tactile maps of the surrounds and other interpretative material supplied by rangers and guides; just like those who are sighted, levels of interest varied. Some people I guided wanted elaborate description of the scenery and some visually impaired and blind people expressed irritation at an ‘overkill of visual description’ on the part of well meaning guides. However most guides developed a dialogue with and sensitivity to individual participants and the amount of visual information which was to be conveyed was negotiated for each individual. For example when I asked sighted guides what they thought their role was Dorothy and Jess, both sighted guides for Vitalise, responded by explaining this sensitivity to individual participants needs.

Jess, Sighted Guide:

I think everyone I have ever guided is far more capable of dealing with obstacles than one could ever anticipate, so I don’t like to overload them with boring information unless I pick up that they need it. But rarely do they need it. So generally speaking I am there if needed and let them deal with that. And

I have to say in terms of, quite surprisingly, in terms of scenery whenever you start going on a bit about the scenery I sort of get the impression that the information isn't wanted.

Dorothy, Sighted Guide:

There is a difference between people who just simply want the exercise; all they want to do is walk and they don't want too much instruction and they certainly don't want to know what is around them and they don't want to feel anything. We saw that erm that prehistoric type fish, you know? carved in the rock and you know I asked 'Do you want to feel it?' 'No-oo' Whereas other people wanted the minute detail. And as I say some people just want you to be quiet, until there is any difficulty in terrain to explain, because they want to listen to the birds and so on. So you hope you develop some sort of sensitivity as to what is wanted...'

On the whole guides were sensitive to the varied demands of the blind and visually impaired people they were leading. However, I sensed that some guides got a lot of satisfaction from giving rich visual description of the environment to those they were guiding and some seemed disappointed when this wasn't appreciated⁷³. Equally many of the blind and visually impaired people were sensitive to the 'role' they were expected to play as 'grateful recipients of assistance' and of the varied needs of the guides and of the guide's desire to share their visual enjoyment. This meant that at times I felt that blind and visually impaired participants expressed an interest in what was seen not because of some innate desire to visualize or recreate what was once seen, but rather simply because a sighted person was interested and perhaps they wanted to please that person. For instance Ella explains '...well I find it quite interesting knowing what people can see, like I will say What can you see? Just, cos it is interesting but not because I am trying to recreate anything really' (Ella p3).

⁷³ Interestingly, the translation of scenery into visual description for people with blindness or visual impairment is something which Colin Fieldsman of 'Fieldsman Trails Ltd.' makes part of his living from. Colin leads regular live 'audio description' walks for local blind and visually impaired people in Chester. On these walks participants wear head sets and Colin broadcasts live 'commentary on the scenery' to participants through a microphone. With walk titles such as 'Erddig Autumn Colours'. He also produces tactile art of many familiar Welsh and Lakeland scenes so that '...visually impaired and blind people can appreciate and share art in their homes with family and friends.' (Fieldsman,2006)

I was particularly struck by this act of ‘empathetic seeing’ on the part of well meaning walkers with blindness. For example, Jenny describes to me how she takes joy in the sight of others and states how ‘...somebody might just stand still and they will go ‘wow’ that’s beautiful and it just makes you feel good because you know it is. So you do get a lot from other people’s comments and their enjoyment of the situation.’ (P1). Jenny, no longer able to see herself, feels through other’s eyes and reactions. She continues:

‘I quite often say to people you don’t have to describe every little thing to me but if there is something that makes you think that is lovely, that is interesting then tell me you know?if it interests them then they might as well speak out about it.’ (Jenny, p4)

Such examples illustrate the way sight/vision is bound up with others experiences as well as our own, this means that even those with limited sight or congenital blindness are never divorced entirely from the feelings and affects of sight and visual culture. We can compare this with the experience of Helen Keller when she writes: ‘Rather than be shut out, I take part in it by discussing it, imagining it, happy in the happiness of those near me who gaze at the lovely hues of the sunset or the rainbow’ (Keller 1908, 70). This collective quality to embodied experience is also a point which Neuroscientist Varela recognizes when he states:

Experience is clearly a personal event, but that does not mean it is private, in the sense of some isolated subject which is parachuted down onto a pre-given objective world. It is one of the most impressive discoveries of the phenomenological movement to have quickly realized that an investigation of the structure of human experience inevitably induces a shift towards considering several layers of my consciousness as inextricably linked to those of others and to the phenomenal world in an empathetic mesh.
(Varela 1996, 15)

Conclusions

People with blindness and visual impairment see landscape in different ways depending on the nature and extent of their sight and the activity they are involved in. Descriptions of visual impairment from ophthalmology give us some insight into how sight is experienced by people with visual impairments. However, how their residual sight is put to use also depends on memory, the walkers' interactions with the material topography and the walkers' interactions with sighted guides. There is no single way in which walkers will always see landscape and previous representational systems of knowing the landscape as picturesque object never entirely script an individual's landscape encounters. This is clearly evident in the case of those with visual impairment, for their landscape encounters also hinge significantly on their embodiment and produce specific sort's of 'landscape gaze'. For example, priority tended to be given to modes of looking which enabled navigation rather than appreciation of the terrain. The walker with blindness also continues to embody the affects of sight despite lacking sight themselves, for example, walkers participated in forms of 'empathetic seeing' sharing the experience of another persons sight. Thus, in the rough topography of the Lakes and Peaks the landscapes that walkers with blindness experience are always landscapes of sight-blindness for their experience of blindness occurs in conjunction with sighted guides.

Synopsis

Adapted to the role of her partner, who is blind, she has learned to rely on her touch and feet.

Chapter 8 – Blind touch and feet-focused talk



Photo 8.1 Feet, boots and ground

‘Imagine if we met up again in 2 years and somebody asked us both to describe the differences in terms of landscape. I am sure you can do more than me you know in terms of the visual. I might be able to describe it to them in terms of like it was more rocky, it was more loose stone you know what I mean? This sort of thing’
(Sarah, p4)

Synopsis

Relegated to the role of locomotion rather than an instrument of thought the foot is often overlooked in our research accounts. In this chapter I reflect on blind walker's touch and their statements about blind tactile impression, in particular I show how people with blindness drew attention to the tactile impressions of their feet, subverting a predominant association of tactile intellect with the hand. This talk of the feet occurred in both interviews and out walking. The insights of this chapter build on the photo essay in Chapter 6 which drew attention to how feet are an essential element for navigating the terrain and on the insights of Chapter 4 which began to establish a critical context in which to read blind interview testimony about touch. The foot-focused talk of walkers is thought to emerge for embodied and practical reasons and also for socio cultural reasons – potentially subverting more tricky or taboo tactile topics.

Researching blind touch

Hannah:

I am hoping you could explain to me a bit more what you got out of or enjoyed about yesterday?

Chris:

Well texture, texture is very important....and obviously you can feel through your feet the texture of what you are walking through... and because you can't visualise where you are about to put your foot that's important, and like I said yesterday ...it is like your knees act as shock absorbers, so your body sort of takes on the role almost of an extra hand, you can feel through the shoe, you are feeling the texture, instead of anticipating with the eyes and generating images with the brain... you have to analyse the texture and feel with your body.

The quote above is selected from the in-depth interviews I carried out with members of blind and partially sighted walking groups. Chris was my first interviewee in this process, the previous day I had been acting as a sighted guide for Chris on a regular

SVIWG walk and I asked him for a follow up interview. Chris was in his mid 40s, partially sighted all his life and now almost totally blind, he could sense some light and dark such as the horizon. He was one of a number of interviewees keen to convey to me the unique nature of his perceptions of the environment and the significance of the feet in navigating and appreciating the terrain.

This particular quote and the wider research situation begin to illustrate four interlinked dimensions of researching and talking of blind touch which I think merit further discussion. Firstly, the possibility that blindness may give rise to unique experiences and insights into touch. For example, Chris alludes to a heightened receptivity to tactile stimulation through the foot. Secondly, the extent to which it is possible to articulate and convey such tactile experiences to other people including the interviewer and thirdly, the stereotypes and assumptions about touch which pervade research situation, including the associations of touch with the hand and fourthly most importantly what maybe a quite literally overlooked element of research – the feet. These interlinked dimensions of researching blind touch will be explored further here.

The articulation of touch

It is important to reflect on what might be considered to constitute touch. The sense of touch permeates every aspect of human existence and it is thought that ‘...to lose the sense of touch is to lose all sense of being in the world’ (Rodaway 1994, 41). The sense of touch can be understood to include not only the skin surface, but also proprioceptive, tactile-muscular and tactile-kinaesthetic senses. Where proprioception is our awareness of our body’s position in space (a vestibular sense is concerned with balance) and kinaesthesia is the sense of movement through space. Our hearing may also be understood to be a form of touch (Ong 1991). Sounds must reach your ears before you can hear them just as surface texture must make contact with the skin before you can feel it⁷⁴ and as Ree writes: ‘In fact one might well think that the sounds we hear have even less ‘outness’ than the objects we touch: like flavours and perfumes, they must pass through openings in our bodies and brush

⁷⁴ In fact, Ingold (2000) argues that the clear distinction that ‘the sighted’ make between touch and hearing may be partly ‘...a consequence of vision, and of the precise delineation of tangible surfaces, at the interface between solid objects and the surrounding medium, that it affords.’ (274)

against concealed interior surfaces before they can be perceived' (Ree 1999, 35). As academics researching touch then it *might* be best to think in terms of what Ingold (2000) has referred to as a 'multimodal feeling-hearing' (274); where ways of hearing and touching landscape are also understood to be ways of becoming in and with the landscape.

Most people are continually 'in-touch' with themselves and their surroundings (we feel clothes, air, warmth, ground, body) and it is the role of the brain to filter out unnecessary information, so that amongst the many aspects of this 'everyday felt' the touches we seek to register and reflect upon are those that are in some way the most important or unusual. For those people who are blind or partially sighted attending to tactile-acoustic stimulation becomes extremely important. With skills such as 'echolocation' (Arias 1993) being key to the navigation and interpretation of the environment and in thinking through the roles of touch for those people with blindness' experience of the countryside the list becomes almost endless. For example, we might think of the touch between the walker and guide, the touch of the wind on the face, touch with the hand, the feelings of different clothes worn for the outdoors, the rub of a walking boot, the touch of a walking cane, the weight in the air prior to a storm, the feeling of rain, the weight of ones own body as we ascend a mountain and the way the landscape echoes and resonates in different settings⁷⁵. But how on earth can we write of this immensity of tactile sensations. How to reduce blind touch or any touch to words?

⁷⁵ For example I asked participant '*I am wondering how you get a sense of the areas you are walking through?*' and received the following responses about sound:

Jim

It is the sound of things really I mean you hear the wind in the trees, you have a sense of being in trees, you can tell if you are closed in or in an open space without being able to see, it is a feeling, but I don't know how to explain it- it is a sort of radar, lots of people who don't see will tell you that. (p2)

Bethan

I suppose it is partly from people's descriptions of them, but I think actually the bit I value most is the bit I get directly from my own senses which is through hearing. Like hearing an aeroplane when you are going up a mountain it sounds like you are up with the aeroplane because there is nothing that it is echoing off. But when you are in a city it is echoing off the buildings ...but when you are up high it doesn't blend in and you just feel much more ...well its just part of the value of the land...so you can hear when you are up high noises below, you can hear emptiness and silence almost and that is not a negative thing, there is a definite quality that you get from silence. So hearing is very important. (P1)

As Chapter 4 on blind testimony began to indicate, when people with blindness talk of touch their talk is neither a pure reflection of touch as it is experienced; nor is it solely trapped within dominant signifying systems about touch or the countryside. Rather their statements must be understood to be the products of 'assemblages'. This is where:

There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders...'
(Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25)

While there is almost an endless diversity of possible touch sensations, touch and talk about touch is to varying degrees socially regulated. Conventions may dictate when, where and with whom one can touch and what is deemed legitimate for touching (Howes 2003). Those who are blind come face to face with such conventions and must often confront or transgress them through their own embodied necessity. For example, research has shown how for the blind spaces of touch are negotiated in the context of museum collections (Hetherington 2000; Hetherington 2002; Hetherington 2003) and public spaces (Cook 1992; Butler 1994). Furthermore discursive conventions dictate what touches are talked about and which are relegated to a solely affective realm existing only in feeling and not acknowledged or articulated (see also Grosz 1994: 97-111). This means that the sorts of tactile sensation which are enacted and talked about by those with blindness *may* inhabit a narrower realm of touch than that which we may identify in any 'academic' introduction. For example, we may extend the idea of touch to the acoustic realm, however when I speak to those with blindness about touch they did not necessarily make this connection. Later in this chapter I turn to this issue in the context of talking about the tendency to associate blind touch with the hand.

While people with blindness may have a greater degree of receptivity to tactile acoustic impression this doesn't necessarily mean that talking about touch is easy for them. Nor does it mean that their statements about touch are any more authentic or unmediated - a trap that previous humanistic research has fallen into (Hill 1985).

Their communication of touch may become constrained by predominantly sighted discourse. There are also other cultural barriers which may effect their desire to talk about or enact touch in the first place. In popular discourse touch may be denigrated – related to our animal instincts (Connor 2006), considered a negative act of emotion and irrationality and placed as inferior to the sense of sight (Jay 1996). If touch is occluded and rendered subordinate in this way such repression may result in only certain forms of touch being articulated *or* enacted. For example, the blind author Kuusisto draws attention to how blind touch is disciplined by sighted norms and he dreams of a ‘planet of the blind’ where people with blindness are uninhibited by sighted norms and are free to touch things like faces, paintings and gardens (Kuusisto 2002).

While some sensation may remain impossible to convey accurately through words certain properties of sensation may simply require the right context and situation in order to make them seem worth saying and explaining; for while people are condemned to bodily experience they are not prisoners of a singular discourse on the body and sensation and as we have noted talk of touch is the product of ‘assemblages’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25). While touch has often been denigrated in Western thought, placed in opposition to the rationality and objectivism of the eye; in much religious and spiritual discourse touch maybe celebrated as healing and feeling, morally superior; a source of prophecy and insight (Barasch 2001; Harvey 2002). This means that despite the limitations I have noted touch may still be considered a worthwhile thing to talk about, particularly for those who are blind. This certainly seems to be the case in relation to blind people’s experiences of the touch of their feet in the countryside, where the feet appear to become a valid point of reflection and discussion.

Assumptions about touch: Hands and feet

In the empirical research I left interviewees to define what they meant by touch. This meant that in some interviews when I asked participants about touch they sought to correct what they considered to be my ‘hand centered’ understanding of touch. So when I asked Derek ‘Is touch important to you, like touching things along the way?’

Derek, a social worker in his mid forties (partially sighted all his life and now almost totally blind) corrected me and explained:

Well yeah but perhaps not quite in the sense that you mean...Even though you have boots on your feet you can detect quite a lot through your boots so in that sense touch does tell you a lot and is helpful. I don't know personally whether touch with the hands is that important, I am not particularly bothered about whether I touch a tree or touch a rock...

When we speak of or picture touch it is common to associate this action with the hand, where the hand tends to be associated with rationality and intellect, for example, we may get an intellectual 'grasp' (Howes 2003). Research on blind touch reiterates this focus on the hands through a concern with the use of mental imagery formed through the touch of the hands (Blanco and Travieso 2003), accessing museum collections through hand touch (Hetherington 2000) and the use of a cane for navigation (Polanyi 1958; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Cook 1992). This association of touch with the hand is also found in many representations and understandings of blindness, as Derrida points out 'the theme of all drawings of the blind is, before all else, the hand. For the hand ventures forth, it precipitates, rushes ahead, certainly, but this time in place of the head, as to precede, prepare and protect it.' (Derrida 1993: 4). Or as Ingold (2000) writes '...tactile space has to be assembled by the blind, bit by bit, through a repetitive and time-consuming exploration with the fingers' (271).

This association of touch, particularly blind touch, with the hand seems to make sense, for by extending touch forward away from the rest of the body the hand may anticipate what the body has not as yet reached. Thus, touch forms at least a partial substitute for the predictive capacity of sight. In fact, for blind walker Chris, quoted at the start of this chapter, hand touch is attributed such significance that it is used as analogy for whole body touch '...your body sort of takes on the role almost of an extra hand.' However an assumption that blind people will inevitably want to touch with the hand could sometimes slip over into intrusive practices on the part of the guides – who at times became convinced that the person they were guiding would definitely want to touch particular, plants or sculptures in order that they have a 'full appreciation' of the walk.

In Darwinian inspired thought the association of active and intellectual touch with the hand, and rational thought with elevation from the ground distinguishes bi-ped humans from our ape cousins (Ingold 2004, 319). Heidegger also distinguished humans from nonhuman animals by their 'unique' possession of a hand⁷⁶. However for Bataille(1985)⁷⁷ human life is misguidedly seen as elevation

...by its physical attitude the human race distances itself as much as it can from terrestrial mud-whereas a spasmodic laugh carries joy to its summit each time its purest flight lands man's own arrogance spread-eagle in the mud-one can imagine that a toe, always more or less damaged and humiliating is psychologically analogous to the brutal fall of a man - in other words to death. (22)

The priority normally given to hands over feet may also have a material basis. While evolution has meant the foot has lost much of its original pre-hensile function, the material structures of modern Western life such as chairs and shoes have also had a tendency to prioritise the upper body over the feet. People's sense of elevation from their feet has been reinforced by the development and widespread use of foot wear. For example, Ingold (2004) argues that in Modern Western thought there has been a blunting both of the receptivity of our minds to the sense of touch of the feet and an actual blunting of our feet through the uses of the shoe.

...it seems that with the onward march of civilisation, the foot has been progressively withdrawn from the sphere of operation of the intellect, that it has regressed to the status of a merely mechanical apparatus, and moreover that this development is a consequence— not a cause — of technical advance in footwear. Boots and shoes, a product of the ever more versatile human hand, imprison the foot, constricting its freedom of movement and blunting its sense of touch. (319)

⁷⁶ Although apparently Derrida takes on Heidegger for this misplaced anthropocentrism. Thanks to Paul Harrison for this insight from Derrida's 'Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand' and for drawing my attention to Bataille's work 'The Big Toe' (1985)

⁷⁷ Bataille was raised by a paralyzed and blind father and it is possible that this may have contributed to his interest in embodied difference and deviance.

But the boot doesn't just blunt, it also mediates and enables, it expands the range of terrain we can walk on and translates tactile messages from the ground into something more manageable by the foot (Micheal 2000). Furthermore the boot itself becomes a surface which is contemplated, particularly when blisters rub against it (Wylie 2005). Thus, any discussion of the effect of footwear on the mind and compartment of the wearer must acknowledge the varied ways in which this might occur. There is no uniform process of 'blunting' and while material and cultural developments may encourage shifts in the uses and understandings of foot touch, each of us use our foot touch in potentially different ways (see also Howes 2003).

At times interview statements of blind tactile impression subverted a predominant association of intellectual touch with the hand, and instead drew attention to the significance of the feet in blind experience. For a number of the participants of blind and partially sighted walking groups touching with the hands was not deemed to be a necessary or desirable component of a walk, rather they drew attention to their feet and boots as enabling both the navigation and appreciation of the terrain. Derek, quoted above, was not bothered about actively touching objects with the hands. Rather, Derek anticipated the terrain and gained a sense of spatial continuity through movement, through the feet and through tactile connection with my own movements as a sighted guide.

Acting as a sighted guide for walking companions I extended their sense of touch beyond their own body into mine. Equally I began to perceive and move through the landscape for two, my companion absorbed into my 'body schema' (Merleau-Ponty 1962) and my body mediating and controlling some of their touch. Interestingly, the significance of this touch between the guide and their walking companion was not something which tended to be talked about openly by participants in the interview setting. Instead, talking about such forms of guiding touch were topics which tended to be re-framed in joking relations and side comments outside the interview context. This 'quiet talk' about touch between walker and guide included topics such as the weight of a particular person on the arm, the insensitive or hurried guiding practice of certain guides, guide's preference for people to touch the back of the ruck sack rather than have someone 'hang on' to the arm, certain preferences for guiding

partners of the opposite sex and the fact that two members of the group had begun to walk hand in hand rather than 'c' grip to elbow. While one walker took me aside after an interview, to tell me in private that he suspected that some male guides 'feared appearing homosexual' walking arm in arm with another man when guiding them and that he thought this was a reason that some members of his local rambling association group were not keen to guide him in this style.

The emphasis on the feet found in interview talk and general talk on the walks may be understood to subvert a discourse on blind touch as primarily associated with the hand. However, it seems that talking about the feet and footwork also offers a solid, 'safe' topic, for interviewer and interviewee, guide and walking companion – much safer than the touches between guides and walkers. The touch between a walker and guide is emergent from a dependent sensory relationship and it is perhaps easiest for those with blindness not to criticize the style of guiding or comment too much in this area for the guides have 'kindly volunteered their time'. Thus, for embodied, practical and socio-cultural reasons feet and foot work were a recurring theme in the interviews. For example at the pub after a hard day's walking in the Lake District congenitally blind walker, Jim, describes some of the absolute concentration which is directed at the feet in order to descend a mountain safely:

Jim:

I think that for a totally blind person who has never seen like myself, what could be for a sighted person a normal ramble, they'd enjoy, could be quite an ordeal... it is just these unknown variables like for example when your boots don't grip... The fact is I have had to use absolutely one-hundred percent concentration... to concentrate on what's under my feet, what am I going over? What's coming next? How much more of it is there to go? It is much more ... 'close to' when you can't see.

From this account it would seem that in the act of walking without sight there is little time for reflection or contemplation. This absolute concentration of the walker, often focused on the feet, can result in a sort of 'in the moment' absorption which entails a form of embodied cognition where balance, locomotion and reflexes all enable the safe navigation of terrain. As Ellen also commented to me 'I think when you are

sighted you look and think it is going to be this and that under your feet but when you can't see the actual awareness goes to your feet'. This concentration on the immediate sensations of the feet might be understood to enable a momentary forgetting of other co-ordinates of identity – such as home, work and life difficulties, a benefit of walking which many of the participants, sighted and blind, alluded to. However, this immediate and immersed quality to walking shouldn't be over emphasised, touch is not only a form of proximal knowledge. While those with congenital or early onset blindness may only have experiential knowledge of sight through cross-modal forms of perception, they inevitably participate in what one interviewee referred to as 'sighted conceptions of things' – sighted discourse and understanding. For those people who had some form of visual memory the touch of the feet also enabled a form of visualisation and distal knowledge – recall of what was once seen. Bethan (blind from early childhood) explains:

Bethan:

....to gather my own impression of what the terrain is like - I get that through my own feet more than anything else. You know?... actually you can pick up a lot of information from your feet and maybe because I used to see it helps piece together a picture of what the whole thing is like just from walking over it.

Thus, the touches of the feet evoke memories and enable Bethan her own form of visual contemplation of the landscape. A form of knowledge which is more to do with grasping the whole and perhaps less to do with the intimate and absorbed sense of touch which has tended to be emphasised in recent social scientific literature on blind touch (Hill 1985; Hetherington 2000). In the ethnography I also noted how the sound of footsteps (itself a form of sonic tactile impression) was significant for the walkers. The sound of footfalls were a warning that people were approaching and a way of judging how far behind they were from the next person. While this was not something directly mentioned by participants it was something I observed. As Keller wrote 'Often footsteps reveal in some measure the character and the mood of the walker. I feel in them firmness or indecision, hurry and deliberation, activity and laziness, fatigue, carelessness, timidity, anger and sorrow' (Keller 1908, 32).

Foot focused thought also extended beyond the moment of doing into other time spaces. For example, for Ellen, an adventitiously blind lady, the tactile foot skills she has developed since becoming blind are significant for they are an important part of being able to challenge certain stereotypes of blindness:

Ellen:

Partially sighted people have the capacity to walk, they develop skills, foot skills for example. ...So often you have a better body awareness in space... your legs and feet are more sensitive to what is down underneath your feet and you read what is underground with your foot. So showing sighted people that even though you don't see you can do.... But it is also about showing partially sighted people that they can do it. Because people they lose their vision and they think they can't do it any more – they have the same stereotypes as any sighted person, so they turn it against themselves.

Footfalls carrying the weight of the body give a sense of spatial continuity with the world and yield a variety of information upon which to act and reflect. In fact place, on one etymological path, can be followed back to *planta* – the sole of one's foot. While my interviews were based around the practice of walking for recreation in the countryside it was obvious that this touch of the foot, as a body practice and as a point of reflection was significant to other more everyday settings. For example, participants spoke of deliberately wearing thin soled foot wear when walking in the city in order to detect tactile paving.

Hannah:

And is footwear important to you both in the city and out on walks?

Ian:

Well ...I find that with trainers, they can mask, especially if they have thick soles they can almost mask what you need to know in the street. Like tactile paving and that it is not really clear. So I tend to wear shoes where you can feel everything...However when I am out walking (in the countryside) I always wear boots because I broke my ankle once (laughs) so I don't risk just wearing trainers because while I know you could get away with it if you can

see where you are putting your feet but when you are not sure you know I think you always need to protect your ankles. (p2)

Conclusions

While learning through touch tends to traditionally be associated with the hand, in interviews and conversations on walks, people with blindness drew attention to their feet as a point of reflection and as aiding the navigation and appreciation of the countryside. This may be understood as a challenge to traditional 'hand-centred' coordinates of body knowledge – certainly in lacking the predictive capacities of sight feet-focused thought is particularly important to blind walkers in the countryside. However, it is also important to acknowledge what other conversational and cultural imperatives might mean that those with blindness draw attention to their feet when talking of touch. Feet-focused talk may act as a subtle form of intervention which helps to subvert other more tricky or taboo tactile topics. As a walker it is easy to talk about the feet – their familiarity, yet their physical distance and banal association makes them a safe topic like the weather or clothing worn that day. As such talking about the touch of the feet may also be understood to be a way of avoiding more difficult topics such as the touch between a walker and their guide – for the touch between walker and guide has the potential to be felt, interpreted or seen by others as a taboo topic. Thus, the talk of touch that I quote here must be understood to be both an interesting insight into the significance of the feet for contemplation and navigation and an insight into how talk of touch is shaped by a wider socio-cultural context which renders some aspects of touch taboo.

Chapter 9 – Landscapes of laughter: The workings of humour and laughter amongst walkers with blindness



Photo 9.1 Members of SVIWG negotiate a stile

Synopsis

Joking relations, humour and laughter were a crucial element of how walkers with blindness come to experience landscape. In this chapter I illustrate some specific instances of humour and laughter amongst the walking groups. I identify how humour and laughter occurred in response to fear, the slapstick and the surprising; to cope with stereotyping and subvert any notion that people with blindness should be the object of pity. I also show how humour and laughter occurred at the research situation including the disjuncture between expectations of a 'formal' recorded interview and what actually happened in practice. In this chapter concepts of landscape and the subject deviate under the force of laughter for the reverberations of laughter penetrate other's bodies blurring landscape-body boundaries and throwing into question what constitutes the 'materiality' of the landscape.

Introduction

'I don't know why they call it the Lake District they might as well call it the rock district!' (All laugh)

(Jack, 80, walking in the Langdale Valley)

'I can see the daffodils in the garden if I bend down and put them to my eye!'
(Laughs to herself) (Jenny, Visually Impaired)

'Right you blind buggers' (Laughter)
(Ellen Addressing the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group)

'I never go to sensory gardens - they stink!' (All laugh)
(Nick, 31, blinded from a head injury)

Humour and laughter was not a topic I fully anticipated writing about at the start of this thesis. However during the ethnographic phase of the research it struck me as an inescapable element of the research process, visually impaired group walking practices and the sense of 'landscape', to which participants contributed. Blind and

visually impaired people tended to adopt a disposition of good humour and cheer toward their predicament as 'blind walkers'. While their laughter both in interview situations and walking group outings was a predominant feature of the research. Belly laughs, titters, giggles, anxious exhalations and guffaws would reverberate through the country air on days out walking, creating a transient sonic element in the landscape⁷⁸. While in interviews laughter served a variety of roles from the easing of interview tensions to the punctuation of conversation. This laughter would occur in response to humour, embarrassment, to the slapstick, the incongruous and the paradoxical – at falls, at farts, at trips and slips, at self-mocking tales, the subversion of stereotypes, in-jokes and laughable laughter.

In this final empirical chapter I will reflect on what laughter and humour, in its varied forms, does to the research situation and to our concepts of landscape. While humour and laughter are not entirely separate phenomena some distinctions can be made. A sense of humour entails the ability to detect a tension between expectation and actuality (Critchley 2002, 9). Sharing humour also tends to require a shared understanding of a 'shared form of life' (Davidson 2001, 174). Laughter is distinguishable from humour for laughter is a muscular phenomenon which interrupts breathing. Laughter works as both a sound and a communication, an expression, a feeling and intellect, both body and mind (Ree 1999, 16). We may also laugh and not know precisely why (Swabey 1961). At times laughter had no clear basis in humour, rather, laughter took on a life of its own, for once we begin to laugh almost anything can become laughable. Our minds and bodies become open to the physical ebb and flow of laughter (Greenfield 2002). However typical jokes in the group (including the examples cited at the start of this chapter) often played on sighted expectations of what blind and visually impaired people will be like and on sighted norms of practice which those with blindness transgressed. While I will proceed to discuss these forms of humour in more detail, firstly, I will identify how blindness has previously been recognized as a comic force and discuss some previous social scientific engagements with ideas of humour and laughter.

⁷⁸ I am not the only one to pick up on the laughter of visually impaired walking Groups. For example Bocking, writing for The Ramblers Association magazine 'The Rambler' writes 'Ellen's chatter and sense of humour is part of the experience, just like the birdsong, and the smells of the flowers and trees. "It's getting a bit steep and slippery now," warns one of Ellen's male companions. "So you mean with a bit of luck I might end up under the pair of you?" she laughs.' (Bocking, D. 2003)

Blindness as a comic force

Recognition of the comic element of blindness is nothing new. However, in plays and literature the laugh has often tended to be on the side of the sighted. The blind person has been the subject of comedy since the Greek farces of antiquity and blind figures have performed a range of comic roles in literature, imagery and plays where the confusion which arises from a character lacking sight or being temporarily blinded leads to both comic and tragic spin offs. For example, in the oldest surviving farce in French literature, the thirteenth century play, *The Boy and the Blind Man* (*Le garçon et l'aveugle*, author unknown), the blind man becomes the subject of laughter. Barasch (2001) explains,

...the desperate blind man pleads for the boy's help, because the boy had warned him not to walk in a certain direction, so as "not to fall into this ditch". But in fact every spectator in the audience could see for himself, there was no ditch at all. It was the crass contrast between the blind man's anxiety and the obvious fact that there was no reason for it that gave rise to laughter...Blindness, or at least the typical result of it, becomes the subject of public mockery.

(Barasch 2001, 107).

In this play the crude use of another's inability to see reveals the power and superiority the sighted may feel in observing those who are blind. Blindness like other disabilities often involves an escape social norms and boundaries, for different bodies inevitably highlight the taken for granted, body dependent nature of much everyday interpersonal interaction (Albrecht 1999). This is an insight also made by Bakhtin who notes how it is often the uncontrollable and unpredictable body that becomes a comic force for such 'deviant' bodies' traverse taboo (Bakhtin 1984, 66). However, the joke is not always on the side of the non-disabled audience – at times the joke is on the temporarily able bodied who are forced to assess the fragility of their own 'able' condition (Albrecht 1999). While in a contemporary climate of

political correctness, the often unspeakable comic character of blindness and other disabilities becomes sayable in the hands of the disabled stand up comic⁷⁹.

Social scientific engagement with humour and laughter

While humour and laughter in one form or another is a cultural universal (Critchley 2002, 66) there has been limited social scientific engagement with this topic. As researchers laughter is often relegated to the brackets in our transcripts and philosophers and social scientific researchers are accused of having only limited engagement with humour and laughter (Billig 2001; Forester 2004; Sanders 2004). This limited engagement is unsurprising for laughter has tended to be associated with a loss of self control and hedonism (Berger 1997, 33) and has been taken as the binary opposite of the serious (Critchley 2002). For Denning humour and playfulness tends to be avoided as a subject of social research for:

True believers in – and the powerful would like to live in – an *ex opere operato* world where all signs effect what they signify in the signifying and everybody is sincere. So mimesis that somehow clones the world is acceptable. It changes nothing. Being playful in the slightest way suggests that things might be otherwise.

(Denning 1996, 113 also cited in Pratt 2000, 646)

However playfulness, humour and laughter need be taken seriously. Amongst the few twentieth century philosophers who have written extensively about humour and laughter are Freud and Bergson. Freud related jokes to the repression of the unconscious and the need to relieve psychic energy that is otherwise repressed (Freud 1994, originally published 1905). While for Bergson humour and laughter is thought to preclude emotion, entailing a ‘...momentary anaesthesia of the heart’ (Bergson 1912, 2). Bergson’s thesis suggests that laughing at what strikes us as funny involves a curtailing of other strong emotions such as pity, love or hatred that might otherwise have occurred in the same situation. In so doing he draws attention to how laughter may have a deadening rather than an enlivening affect. His ideas been

⁷⁹ See for example Chris McCausland a British blind stand up comic and Winner of the J2O Last Laugh talent award.

drawn upon by numerous writers on humour. For example, the Sociologist Berger also argues that the comic and laughter requires abstraction from the web of emotions arguing that ‘...the comic conjures up a separate world, different from the world of ordinary reality, operating by different rules. It is also a world in which the limitations of the human condition are miraculously overcome’ (Berger 1997, x). But such understandings of laughter and humour as distinct from the everyday and as separate from emotion seem to take a rather narrow view of the workings of humour, laughter and emotion. I don’t think laughter and humour can be so easily separated off from the everyday and from emotion. Humour and laughter are very much part of everyday life (see also Critchley 2002) and are involved in the translation and expression of emotions, serving to express a range of dispositions, feelings and attitudes that may otherwise go unacknowledged.

Recent social scientific work which has engaged with ideas of laughter and humour reveals how laughter and humour can communicate disapproval, or mark a point at which consensus is threatened (see also Bergson 1912 ; Delph-Janiurek 2001), be used by disabled people to redefine a seemingly tragic situation into something amusing (Stronach and Allan 1999); be a means for expressing and partially disguising racial hatred (Billig 2001) and it has been found that for sex workers humour and laughter can form part of a complex system of ‘emotion–work’ which enables them to cope with the demands of their trade, protect their private life, translate feelings of distress into laughter, communicate sensitive information and delineate group membership (Sanders 2004). Forester has also considered the role of humour and irony by mediators and community planners in ‘participatory’ negotiating processes and finds that humour can also change the course of a conversation, shift expectations and relationships, and turn suspicion toward hope and action (Forester 2004). While Davidson (2001) in her research with self-help groups for people with agoraphobia found that ‘in-jokes’ left her feeling relatively excluded as a researcher. My research builds upon these recent insights into the workings of humour and laughter but it is also distinguishable from them through the specific focus on blind and visually impaired walkers and the treatment of laughter as a physiological as well as a conscious psychological phenomenon.

In the following pages I describe in more detail some of the qualities, affects and functions of laughter discernable in the empirical element of my research and relate these to contemporary research and philosophical reflections on the topic. I will also explore the limits to those explanations, for at times we may laugh and find no cause. In particular I will ask the following questions in relation to my research: In what situations does humour and laughter ‘appear’? And what does laughter do to our concepts of landscape and the subject?

The appearance of laughter and some background dispositions of cheer

One of the most noticeable things which carried through the country air on outings with blind and visually impaired walking groups was not the smells of the countryside or the sounds of the wind but the noise of laughter and its accompanying affects. Walking in landscape animated individuals, who in turn contributed to that very landscape through the sound and affect of their laughter. Amongst walking group members there was a sort of expectation of good humour and cheer. To be miserable was to subvert the norms of the group as I discovered in my attempts to drop out of one long walk due to blisters! These cheery norms echo some of the earlier traditions of working class walking practice mentioned in chapter 3, where walking was an escape from the drudgery of working life and an opportunity for sing song and cheer.

Laughter emerged from a background disposition of cheer amongst walking group members. The embodied practice of walking itself seemed to help create this cheer and a general sense of well-being, pleasure and attention to the moment against which it was easy for laughter to come into being. As we noted in Chapter 3 after twenty minutes of brisk walking endorphins are released and we are therefore more likely to feel cheerful when walking than when sedentary. Laughter is also thought to help alleviate pain (Greenfield 2002, 153) and it is possible that the pain of walking long distances each day created a desire for the humour and resulting laughter which could potentially lift people from their individual states of pain. Thus, expectations, bodies, endorphins, collective momentum and varied terrain coincided to produce a background disposition of cheer, humour and eruptions of laughter. The cheer was self reinforcing for it circulated and was an expected disposition amongst group

members. Blind walker's dispositions of cheer may also be understood to emerge from their learnt social role. A role first identified by Scott (1969) in his book 'The making of blind men' where he argues that 'the blind' must often learn to adopt a happy and submissive social role due to their dependence on the sighted.

Analysing laughter

Laughter and the humour it may be based upon are fragile events which are very difficult to write about. While discursive analysis can reveal the ways in which what strikes people as funny is historically and culturally relative, examples of humour and laughter continually exceed the theoretical analysis we are able to give them. As the Sociologist Berger (1997) writes,

...the experience of the comic is highly fragile, fugitive, sometimes hard to remember. What seems funny in one moment may suddenly take on a tragic quality in the next moment, a joke may be so subtle it barely reaches the level of full attention, and this is why only a short time later it may be difficult to recall just why something evoked amusement. (xii)

This fragility of the comic presents clear difficulties for the researcher of this phenomenon. Laughter is complex, cutting across, bodies, airspaces, humorous ideas, meanings, relationships and emotions. The precise affects of the humour and laughter are also very difficult to find an appropriate vocabulary and grammar for. As any tale teller will know it is impossible to precisely re-invoke a comic situation which provoked laughter and while we maybe able to explain humour we may not always be able to pin down the cause of laughter. Further, instances of humour and laughter will have initially been overlooked in my field noting process for I did not anticipate writing about humour and laughter at the beginning of the research. This relatively inattentive disposition at the outset of the research may have also been of benefit for perhaps there is nothing more likely to stop people laughing than saying you are researching humour and laughter!

Humour and laughter in the group has also been a difficult phenomenon to reflect upon and write about for it was not always clear why people found something funny.

In fact, while we may speculate as to the cause of laughter its causes and effect maybe more complex than we can predict. Misinterpretation of humour is as likely as misinterpretation of any form of speech. For example, when I transcribe laughter at particular points in the interview I am aware that in listening to my laughter it is more hearty than the jokes necessarily call for. I laugh at appropriate points but my reasons are potentially more complex than the transcript indicates. It must also be borne in mind that relationships in the group extended beyond what I observed. That is to say the precise context from which laughter emerged amongst other members of the group was difficult to record, for at times it entailed a history of verbal and embodied interaction between participants which stretched beyond the interview and ethnographic context, through friendships and relationships which exceeded the remit, understanding and timescales of my own involvement. Our own laughter may coincide with another's laughter but may not always correspond with the purpose, object or effect of another person's laughter – a point Kundera makes in his novel 'Laughter and Forgetting' (Kundera 1982). This fact points towards some of the limits of understanding laughter and humour.

Laughter may also have no discernable reason being simply a muscular reflex with no clear conscious cause. Our laughter may surprise us for laughter has an infectious quality to it which defies the limits of discourse and dislocates our sense of a rational reflective subject. Laughter provokes laughter in others and once we start to laugh it becomes easier to laugh at anything – opening ourselves to the present moment, the flow and rhythm of laughter (Greenfield 2002, 156). The television industry has long recognised this infectious quality to laughter through the use of dubbed in sounds of laughter in sit-coms. This infectious quality to laughter is also evidenced by the popular early phonograph – the 'Okeh Laugh Record' in America, released shortly after World War one and consisting of a trumpet intermittently interrupted by laughter and the 'Laughing Policeman' music hall song of the 1920s re-popularized in the 1970s. Both these records involve laughter which makes the listener laugh. These are clearly aspects of laughter which cannot be explained by discourse, culture and history alone and psychology, physiology and neuroscience can help us to reflect on this reflex of laughter.

The infectious nature of laughter points towards its 'excessive' quality. The philosopher Bataille was particularly concerned with these excessive moments of experience – extreme states such as laughter and tears which disarm predictable, rational patterns of thought (Bataille 1985). For Bataille, laughter lays bare non-knowledge (Botting and Wilson 1997)⁸⁰. Hilarious laughter is an extreme, excessive state which shatters the rationality of the individual. It can disarm seemingly predictable patterns of thinking and feeling, catching us off guard. The individual can no longer explain their laughter, they are caught up in its ebb and flow. It is laughter beyond reason. At this limit, knowing subjectivity is torn apart, laughter reverberates and penetrates others, one person slips into another (Botting and Wilson 1997). This humour and this irrational, reverberating laughter requires us to envision the space of research as more varied than some methodological textbooks would allow. The space of research is no longer simply the space of authentic testimony, rather it may be considered to be a 'riotous theatre of transgression' (Pratt 2000, 650) Where: 'Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter.' (Bakhtin 1984, 66).

Laughter and the matter of landscape

In choosing to analyse laughter, we may appear to have come a long way from the 'matter' of landscape. Certainly the reverberations of laughter stretch our notion of matter and our notions of what matters about landscape and laughter requires us to question what constitutes the tangible properties of landscape. If, as Rose and Wylie suggest '...landscape names a perception-with, the creative tension of self and world' (Rose and Wylie 2006, 478) then laughter maybe understood as an emergent element of the landscape. Laughter forms part of the creative tension of landscape, through simultaneously being very personal and also a sound which constitutes part of the landscape and penetrates others. Thinking through laughter as an emergent element of the landscape is a comparable process to thinking of the weather as part of the landscape. For example, Ingold (2006) argues that the matter of landscape does not simply stop at the view from the eye or the ground beneath our feet but extends into and is produced through the 'weather world':

⁸⁰ Feminist Helen Cixous also recognizes this excessive quality to laughter. She argues that women are trapped in phallo-centric language which doesn't allow us to express ourselves and she employs laughter as a strategy of excess in her writing (Cixous, H. 1994).

The equation of materiality with the solid substance of the earth creates the impression that life goes on upon the outer surface of a world that has already congealed into its final form, rather than in the midst of a world in perpetual flux. Between mind and nature, persons and things, and agency and materiality, there is no conceptual space for those very real phenomena and transformations of the medium that generally go by the name of weather. (Ingold 2006, 16).

For Ingold, weather constitutes part of the 'perpetual flux' of landscape and in this research the reverberation of laughter may also understood as matter of sorts which constitutes part of this 'perpetual flux' of landscape. Such an approach requires us to stretch our ideas of the 'reality of landscape' and engage with a form of 'ontological politics' (Mol 1999) that is about what is or could be made more real (see also Law and Urry 2004) (Chapter 1). Our laughter slips into the landscape and in so doing perceived boundaries are blurred. That is not to say that I have suddenly collapsed into complete relativism and can now refer to anything as landscape – some realities remain easier to bring into being than others. However in this research laughter and humour was easy to engage with for the research field notes and interviews were littered with examples of its workings.

The qualities, roles and affects of humour and laughter

During the research, humour and laughter emerged in a variety of situations and took on a number of roles. There was humour and laughter in response to fear, the slapstick and the surprising, humour and laughter to cope with stereotyping and subvert any notion that people with blindness or visual impairment should be the object of pity; humour which translated tragedy into comedy; humour and laughter at the research situation including the disjuncture between expectations of a 'formal' recorded interview and what actually happened in practice. These forms of humour and laughter are not mutually exclusive but for the sake of clarity I will identify and illustrate them here before moving on to discuss the potentials and limits of identifying and understanding the laughter of landscape.

Laughter in response to fear, the slapstick and the surprising

Surprise, nervousness and relief are often acknowledged as elements of the experience of humour and laughter that can be learnt from a young age (Swabey 1961; Critchley 2002; Buckley 2003). Nervous laughter, particularly on the steep Lake District hills was a common experience. The fears that both visually impaired walkers and sighted guides faced when traversing a steep waterfall or negotiating a slippery and steep descent seemed to be dispelled through an anxious exhalation or at times a laugh. For as Critchley notes 'We often laugh because we are troubled by what we laugh at, because it somehow frightens us.' (Critchley 2002 56-57). The surprise of a fall and the relief that everyone is all right meant the regular slips, trips and falls that occurred when we were out walking also tended to be translated into something funny rather than tragic. As Jack, (80 years old, born in Cyprus and blinded from malaria in his twenties) demonstrated when he tripped on yet another rock along a path in the Lake District Langdale valley and he exclaimed 'I don't know why they call it the Lake District they might as well call it the rock district!' This exclamation was followed by laughter from many of the nearby group members. Jack's humour translated the potentially worrying, painful and frustrating experience of walking along a rocky path into laughter and as the group leader put it '...his good humour keeps us all going'. His humour and laughter was translated into a group experience. In such circumstances laughter maybe understood to lift someone from their individual pain – laughter enabled them to share in the reverberations of theirs and others laughter. Laughter acted as release and relief, after the shock of a trip or fall laughter worked to dispel the momentary anxiety that had been felt. Helping walking participants cope with the demands of walking in the rough topography of the countryside.

I think that as guides we may have laughed particularly heartily precisely because there was awareness that people with blindness could not see a smile or other visual acknowledgement. Therefore sounds including the sound of laughter were used regularly in these walking groups to help the non-visual communicative process. Laughter could say I'm here, I'm with you and I saw you fall and I am glad you are ok. While some theories of laughter suggest that it emerges primarily from a sense of superiority (Buckley 2003) rarely did it seem that the laughter I heard was laughter of superiority, a simple enjoyment of another person's misfortune. Rather, laughter

took on a more charitable and caring tone, it seemed to indicate relief – a delayed expression of the care, fear and concern which had been felt. For example, when acting as a sighted guide I fell into a drain in the Lakes, it was quite shocking and after the fall I had to do a brief body check to ensure that all my limbs were still intact. Congenitally blind Chris was holding onto my arm at the time of my fall, on hearing I was ok he expressed his relief through humour and laughter, ‘yes, I thought you had suddenly got shorter’. We all laughed and the momentary anxiety that had been felt by participants was, at least partially, dispelled.

Coping with stereotyping

Laughter and the humour it was based upon worked to cope with stereotyping and subvert any notion that blind and visually impaired people should be the object of pity. Jokes and laughter both within interviews and out walking illustrate this point. For example, I heard the visually impaired group leader Ellen refer to her fellow walking participants as ‘blind buggers!’ on a number of occasions. Such a statement maybe understood to be a way of colonising disability humour and may also perform an emancipatory role. As Albrecht notes ‘...inside jokes add to disability culture by providing a bond to this minority or marginalized group; hence ‘crip humour’ (Albrecht 1999, 72-73).’ However as he proceeds to point out ‘What they [people with disabilities] accept from their peers, they may not tolerate from others because of the perceived intent of the language or joke.’ (73). Humour and laughter out on walks and in the pub at the end of the day was a way in which blind and visually impaired people managed expectations and stereotypes of what they need and can do. For example, Ellen and Bethan explain to me how they used humour and laughter to manage the emotions and thoughts associated with low expectations of their ability to navigate and think for themselves.

Ellen:

....there is sometimes situations you are in, where you will have a better relationship with someone if you let them do it, you know? Independence isn’t always the most important thing [...] So...sometimes I will be standing waiting to cross the road and someone will come up to me and say Are you wanting to cross the road? And I will think yeah I would be crossing the road if you just shut up and let me listen to the traffic! Do you know what I mean?

(laughs) But being courteous and sometimes allowing them to help me is as much for them as for me... and we help ourselves, like today I was walking down holding onto Vera's arm, because she has a bit more sight than me and has enough sight to guide me you know? It is a fine line... and you know sometimes I am just too damn lazy and I just think oh I will let some body else do that (both laugh) ... sometimes some little person will come upto me and say can I help you?, and well I do think erm ok you don't get much chance to help people go on then. (p7- 8)

Bethan:

.....it is the assumptions some people have and it is a difficult context in which to break those assumptions if they are guiding you. There was one lady in Austria and she was a retired school teacher and I think she was like this with people whether you were sighted or not but she would treat you as if you were completely incapable 'Sit, Stay' (laughs) step with your left there and your left foot there and she would get really cross if you didn't put the right foot down. It was actually funny and everyone had the same experience and we laughed about it and bonded over it, if you see what I mean, but if I had been on my own I would have felt quite upset I think after that. I think that is what creates the tension, and if someone is going out of their way to make your life more enjoyable it is difficult. It is great if you communicate well but if they can't pick up on erm conventional signals (laughs) it can be a bit problematic. (p4-5)

Bethan and Ellen's statements indicate the way in which walkers with blindness used comedy and humour in order to cope with the attitudes and assumptions of the sighted guides they at times depended upon. For Ellen humour was used to overcome uncomfortable feelings related to playing the 'disabled role' (see Porter 2000) as a passive and needy recipient. While the laughter of the group in Bethan's example performed a range of uses, for it provided emotional relief and it served to bond certain members of the group '...we laughed about it and bonded over it'. Humour also indicated disapproval of those who do not understand the source of the laughter – insensitive guiding. This use of humour to communicate disapproval is another well recognized element of the political work that humour can do (Bergson 1912 ,

Forester 2004). Bethan's statement shows how insensitive guiding was transformed into a subject for humour however in another circumstance this might be quite upsetting. Laughter provided emotional relief.

Clearly the affect of relief that laughter provides is not a new insight. In fact, it has long characterized the way in which emotional registers of audiences in the theatre are conducted. For example, in ancient Greek theatre comic relief would come in the form of a satyr play, which followed the tragic drama making the emotions evoked by tragedy more bearable (see Berger 1997, 16-17). Previous research in psychology has shown laughing can enable us to 'dissociate' from feelings of distress (Keltner and Bonnano 1997) and this relieving and dissociating properties of laughter might be understood as a useful individual psychological coping strategy. However we may also read this situation as the blind and visually impaired walkers being complicit in an emotional transaction where the sighted guides 'the abled' are using those with blindness to make themselves feel more able and better about themselves.

The translation of tragedy into comedy

As I have already begun to show often the distressing nature of losing sight or lacking vision was turned into something humorous. For example Jenny explained to me 'I can see the daffodils in the garden if I bend down and put them to my eye.' and then she punctuated the end of her sentence with laughter. However, in other circumstances and settings I felt it could just as easily have been tears which completed her sentence. Some of the deep sadness that people such as Jenny felt at the loss of sight seemed to be translated or left only partially expressed through the use of laughter. In fact it seems that amongst the visually impaired walking groups and the hills of the Lake District and Peak District the potentially distressing nature of losing or being without sight came to light much more through humour and laughter than tales of woe. Maybe Nietzsche got it right when he observed, 'Perhaps I know best why man alone laughs: he alone suffers so deeply that he had to invent laughter. The unhappiest and most melancholy animal is, as is fitting, the most cheerful.' (Nietzsche 1968). Laughter is a serious element of the human condition and as previous research on the humour of disabled people has noted '....the comic is never quite absent from the discourse of tragedy' (Stronach and Allan 1999, 42).

In some ways perhaps the laughter of participants performed a similar role to crying, for laughter like tears provided a relief of a tension (Greenfield 2002, 158). However, laughter unlike tears tends to be a more acceptable disposition amongst strangers, it does not demand the same concerned response and it subverts notions of pity.

Undoubtedly, I am therefore also implicated in their laughter. This fact, alongside the fact that the seemingly tragic circumstance of losing sight can be re-worked into something laughable, maybe interpreted as a barrier in interview communication. Certainly laughter was not always the response I expected. However, it must also be recognised that participants' use of laughter and humour seemed to be indicating a useful coping strategy. A strategy they seemed to use both socially out on walks as well as in interview situations.

Laughter and humour worked to ease embarrassment. The people with blindness and visual impairment that I spoke to were at times unwilling to talk extensively about their own personal experiences of nature and some of the non-visual sensations that they utilised or reflected upon when out walking. There seemed to be a degree of embarrassment about talking of the way in which they enjoyed the countryside via senses other than sight. For example, Terry in the extract below apologises for mentioning the sensations of being outside prefacing it with '... sounds corny but' and continuing to state 'just to feel the wind on your face and that ...(laughs) or the rain, smell the wet leaves and all that business and hear the bird song. Yes.' (Terry, p3) While the use of sarcasm and a sarcastic tone left me wondering whether they simply said something on this topic in order to satisfy my question, whether they truly enjoyed these things but were just embarrassed to talk about it or whether they were deliberately subverting compensatory stereotypes of blind people being more 'in tune' with their other senses, nature or the spiritual (Chapter 4). For example, in the extract below Chris refers to 'nature's embrace' but refers to this in a sarcastic tone and follows the statement with laughter – undermining my potential desire to take this statement seriously.

Hannah:

What about the weather when you are out how does that affect what you sense you are passing through?

Chris:

If it is a very, very windy day that knocks things on the head really,...but well I still enjoy it but umm you don't get the sounds further off. But I love the feel of the wind say a breeze going through a valley,...natures' embrace!
(laughs) (p2)

Laughter at the research topic and terms

As Chapter 2 began to indicate the idea of asking people with blindness about landscape and the very fact that blind and visually impaired people go walking in scenic and rough mountain areas struck both colleagues and blind walkers themselves as funny. Sometimes the comic element of blind walking practices was capitalized on by participants and they would joke with me about what they had seen that day. For many participants landscape was associated with the view and the scenery, or with specialist knowledge. To them it seemed somewhat ridiculous that a researcher of landscape would want to talk to a group of blind and visually impaired people - what could they tell me that I didn't already know? One of the walkers from the Sheffield group even suggested that I would be better off consulting some geologists for they would know more about landscape than her! For Henry this research situation was literally laughable. As he comments to me,

Hannah:

...I was wondering when I say landscape what do you think?

Henry:

I would probably think of a painting first of all possibly by Constable something like that, of the traditional English countryside, you know the trees possibly in the foreground, a stream running by, a lot of green grass and rolling hills further into the background and a blue sky with some white fluffy clouds.

Hannah:

and where do you remember those paintings from?

Henry:

I don't know, but that is possibly my perception, when you say landscape that is what I conjure up, that image, that is my immediate perception of landscape and when you said you were studying landscape at first, I thought well where do we fit into this you know as blind people going out into the countryside? Where do we come into that! (laughs) that was my first thought.
(p9)

Laughter and humour in interviews was important for it helped to flag up some of the incongruities between interviewee and interviewer's understandings of terms. Incongruities which are a classic source of humour and laughter (Berger 1997). At times the connotations of the term landscape alienated me from the research participants. This abstract term was hard to relate to for many participants. When I asked the question 'I'm doing landscape research but I am also interested in what others understand by the term. What do you understand by the term landscape?' Most people associated landscape with a view, a picture or with professional expertise.

Ken, blind since the age of twelve was the only one to colonise the term landscape and put it into his own terms suggesting 'Landscape is sort of where I come across walking about I suppose like err obstacles, different situations and where things are basically' (p1). Ken's response was not indicative of the majority of responses. As the chapter on feet, boots and ground has shown motives for and the sensations of walking were easier topics to converse about – much easier than blind and visually impaired people's ideas or experiences of 'landscape' - a laughable topic.

The disjuncture between expectations and reality

Laughter at the research situation also emerged from the disjuncture between expectations of a 'formal' recorded interview and what actually happened in practice such as loud coffee machines, tape recorders going wrong, items knocked over, interruptions, sneezing fits etc. Such disjuncture between expectations and reality is another well recognised element to comic experience (Berger 1997; Critchley 2002). One particular example of this disjuncture in the research situation occurred at a Youth Hostel in the Lake District.

At the Youth Hostel the interviewee Bethan and I had to change interview locations three times during the course of the hour. In the first location, a 'quiet' room in the youth hostel a member of staff came into the room and had to use the phone. We then went outside and became plagued by mosquitoes, which both of us politely ignored until we developed a few bites and we decided to move inside again. Unfortunately, inside it had become noisy, with new walking groups arriving and we were continually interrupted. I kept turning the tape recorder off and on during the course of this interview. However, on reflection our fits of giggles and banter at the foolishness of our interview endeavours may have been equally noteworthy elements of the research. Our laughter certainly revealed something of our expectations of how interviews 'should' be and how people, mosquitoes and other uncontrollable factors (including our own bodies' laughter) can intervene to give disorder to that supposedly orderly and controlled process. We coped with the frustration and embarrassment of a thwarted interview format through humour and laughter.

The researcher's use of humour

As a researcher I used and relied upon humour as part of the research process. My sense of humour alongside that of participants contributed to the internal dynamics of the research and interview process and it is clear that my own use of humour and laughter is implicated in interviewee's responses to me. My use of laughter in interviews and the wider ethnographic process also related to feelings of nervousness about facilitating the interview (see also Gouin 2004) and to my attempts to develop a comfortable research relationship with participants. Anxious tensions seemed to lower my resistance to laughter. At the outset of the research I felt awkward, clumsy and unnatural in these new roles as a sighted guide and as a researcher/interviewer. My gestures and facial expressions which normally help me to be understood were invisible to participants. This resulted in specific anxieties regarding how I came across. I also felt somewhat uncomfortable with the idea that I was preying on these 'poor blind people' in order to elicit responses for my thesis. Such early inhibitions and anxieties were expressed in my field diary,

10th March 2004:

How do I come across through just my voice and arm? Will they recognize these qualities when I meet up tomorrow? Do my actions and the sound of my

speech alone convey all that I would normally want to convey through gesture, body language and facial expression? What is lost and how can I compensate for that? ...Am I being ridiculous in attending to all this too closely? Shouldn't I just treat them like anyone else? – I can't, surely that's the point.

While many of these anxieties were subject to critical reflection when I returned to my desk they were often dealt with in the present time through laughter. I would dispel anxieties through laughter at appropriate points in order to relieve the mental 'tension' (see also Swabey 1961) and bring me back to the current interview situation or task at hand. Like other pleasurable stimulants such as food and sex, laughter is thought to contribute to an increased focus on the here and now through sensory stimulus and the release of endorphins. Laughter tends to involve open mouth smiling, postural relaxation, the shoulder and torso shaking elevated heart rate, release of endorphins and an increase in levels of expiration (Holland 1982). For the Neuroscientist Greenfield (2002) such laughter may help us to orientate toward the present,

By laughing we are able to provide our own strong sensory stimulus that prevents other more sophisticated, distracting, personalized associations from creeping in. Our diaphragm is oscillating in a strong gyration, the laughter itself is loud in our ears, and we are breathing in a more exaggerated fashion (155).

She continues to suggest that laughter may serve a useful function for it '...offsets the dangers of retreating into our extensive minds (156)'. Certainly post laughing respiration is often deeper causing us to be more relaxed. Further 'It is possible that laughter-induced release of naturally occurring opiates could favour, as does morphine itself, less extensive neuronal connections, which in turn induces a state of mind in the here and now' (Greenfield 2002,154). Thus, the laughter of the interviewer or interviewee can perform a useful function, bringing us to the present and dispelling tensions.

While Buckley suggests in his work on the morality of laughter that ‘...few emotions are stronger than the fear of being a butt.’ (Buckley 2003, xi) I conveyed myself as a potential object of humour in order to be integrated into the good-humoured expectations of the walking group. I see my own attempts at humour were as at times representing a gesture of vulnerability toward participants for I hoped to convey to fellow participants in the research the ways in which I was not putting myself above them. I offered myself up as someone who wasn’t necessarily superior to them but rather someone who could be poked fun at. This approach of researching with good humour is one recommended by (Sclavi 1994) for whom reflecting on her research in the Bronx argues that if we conveyed sympathy each time a tragic tale was recounted to us then these tales would not be told so often. She even goes so far as to argue that ‘expressions of solidarity by way of commiseration are fundamentally paternalistic. They make you feel small in the face of somebody big. This is another feeling that people in the Bronx can do without’ (Sclavi 1994, 5). For Sclavi neither sympathy nor passive listening was adequate in the face of tales from the Bronx. Instead she suggests that,

‘... humor is a valid technique for enabling a potential loser to preserve self respect; secondly, that self-respect is the premise for refusing to lapse into resignation, and for continuing to put up a fight....humorism is a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for change’
(Sclavi, 1994, 6)

Thus humour is not necessarily about poking fun or denying problems, rather it can be about understanding that some issues can be laughed about and that by laughing we bring issues into the interview agenda which might otherwise have been left aside. There were instances where the tales of participants may have been met with a serious response and a call for action. When Gail told me how she accidentally sat on the lap of a man on the bus, on the way to a walk. I could have got irritated on her behalf, didn’t he see you had a white cane? Why didn’t he make his presence heard? Was he sitting in a disabled seat? However, Gail seemed to want to tell her tale, not for resolution but for relief from the embarrassment it had initially caused. Laughing seemed a more appropriate response at the time.

Laughter and humour has been shown to aid researcher relations (see also Gouin 2004) and laughter can act as an indicator of narrowing communicative distances, as the Danish born comedian Victor Borge famously said: 'Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.' By conveying myself as an object of humour it was possible in some ways to be integrated into the cheery norms of the group. Jokes circulated around my student status (poor, lay about, boozier) and jokes also circulated around my looks and availability such as 'Which lucky young man gets the lovely Hannah to guide them'? I was less happy about the latter and did not encourage this humour for fear of misleading people who I knew were very keen for a companion. I laughed but I also emphasised that I had a boyfriend. So laughter and humour did not always ease social bonds or enable easier interaction between myself and other research participants. Reactions to jokes also served to reinforce certain boundaries⁸¹. Thus while humour aided some research relations there is no clear relationship between laughter, humour and research rapport for these may involved a range of personal and communicative spatialities. For example 'in-jokes' amongst the researched may also serve to extend the communicative distance between researcher and researched (Davidson 2001). Interestingly, humour did enable both myself and the researched to talk about topics which might otherwise have been deemed too silly or odd for an interview setting. Humour also allowed me to ask questions I may otherwise have felt were too cheeky or probing. For example by phrasing something in a joking manner, people could either correct me or laugh it off. For example, with Chris I asked

Hannah:

..you were joking I think but we walked past a sort of weir for Lady Bower Reservoir

⁸¹ For example toward the end of one interview I managed the following situation with laughter:

HM: ... is there anything else you want to ask me?
 K: Are you free for a date?
 HM: ahh (both laugh)...No sorry
 K: ahh that's told me
 HM/ K: (both laugh again)
 HM: I will try and find you someone, a free woman
 K: That would be nice (p7)

Chris:

Oh the water wall

Hannah:

Yeah and I said it sounded like a football crowd and you said, you've got it, you've started thinking like a visually impaired person and I thought back to that and I thought was he joking? (laughs)

Chris:

Well when we are walking I like to joke anyway because it breaks up the walk you know? and it's the imagination which kicks in and like yesterday we were walking through this thick deep mud and it was really difficult and I said to Heather, Oh this is dead man's walk and she thought I was serious, and I said several people have been found to be stuck in the mud here and somebody once found a skeleton stuck in boots!

Hannah:

yeah, (laughs)

Chris:

and I think well it's the imagination, you feel the texture under your feet and you think oh my boot's gonna be stuck in the mud and I am going to be stuck here, I could be stuck here for days and maybe no one will find me...and yeah it's funny, but it is the sort of thing that races through your mind.

Hannah:

and having been out with other VIs⁸², do you think this is somehow distinctive to VIs ?

Chris:

⁸² I use the term VIs here to refer to visually impaired people. This is something that the walking group participants including chris regularly referred to each other as. For example the group leader would say ' Have all the VIs got a guide? Or they would sometimes jokingly refer to themselves as VIPs

I don't think it's distinctive, but I do think we are more open, we would talk about it more, whereas a sighted person, they might briefly think of something like that but then they would see something and their mind would be distracted, but you know if you are walking for like two minutes in the mud as a VI then you are just thinking about what you are doing at the time. You aren't thinking about what you are going to have for your tea but you are just thinking about where you are going to place your foot, and then you think arghh I m going to be stuck here...and then you realise how funny it is like.. somebody yesterday they fell over and everyone was very serious and I just said well 'you can't go breaking your eggs' (both laugh – although I seem to laugh more because I don't find the joke that funny and Chris does)... well you know its silly but it lightens things you know?

(p6-7)

In this section of the interview Chris describes a range of instances where he uses humour and laughter in order to define situations in comic terms. As the interviewer I laugh with him, he seemed to expect laughter and it would have felt odd not to. His self presentation demanded laughter and I found what he said humorous (although not necessarily for the same reasons). Chris's irritation over endless sticky mud is translated into a comic narrative about 'dead mans walk' and he redefines the potentially serious reaction to a fall through a comic remark. As a blind walker, Chris is immersed in the task at hand (traversing the mud) and is undistracted by vision, his reflections shed light on these particular circumstances and the ways in which he deals with his situation through humour. This reinforces and elaborates the point made in Chapter 8 that when you lack the stimulation of sight the imagination may well end up focusing on the tactile sensations of the feet, particularly when you are in the tricky topography of the Lakes and Peaks.

Laughter and lightness

Chris in the extract quoted above explained to me how his humour works to 'lighten things'. This is commensurate with phenomenologically inspired descriptions of laughter which tend to associate laughter with a feeling of 'lightness'(Critchley 2002). This feeling of lightness is a source of hope for some researchers (Sclavi

1994; Forester 2004) for laughter can dispel embarrassment or anger and allow a release of tension or the clearing of the air. The emotional weight of concerns, anxiety and fears seem to be offset by the 'lightness' that humour and laughter can help us to feel. Sanders (2004) also recognizes this affect of humour with reference to her research on sex work, when she writes; 'Humour and ridicule make sex work more palatable and lightens the reality of the work' (283). Laughter changes our posture and breathing, bringing us into the here and now.

However, descriptions of lightness and hope in relationship to laughter may not always be appropriate. Some people have disorders of expression, crying without feeling sad and laughing without feeling happy (Parvizi et al. 2001). We may also distinguish between different types of laughter, the intentional laugh and the uncontrollable one. In psychology these are referred to as 'duchenne' and 'non-duchenne' laughter. Where non-duchenne laughter simply entails muscle action around the lips and duchenne laughter also involves a muscle which orbits the eye and pulls skin from the cheeks and forehead toward the eyeball. Duchenne smiles and laughter are thought more genuine for they have been associated more consistently with pleasant stimuli, positive feelings and reduced grief severity than non-duchenne laughter (Keltner and Bonnano 1997). Therefore it may be that only some types of laughter may be associated with lightness.

Laughter can be forced and it can have a dismissive 'deadening affect'. Laughter also varies in intensity from hysterics to a short exhalation. In intense laughing, like intense weeping we lose our sense of control over our bodies. If we slip into gasps of hilarious laughter, just like crying the draw becomes almost uncontrollable – anything becomes laughable. Can such intensity of laughter continue to be associated with lightness? Does it not create an unbearable weight of its own? Particularly if it is being suppressed due to an awareness of its inappropriate timing! There is no clear moral status to laughter (Buckley 2003) and laughter may not always lighten things. While laughter might be a useful coping strategy for the individual it may not always be a universal positive.

Limits to understanding laughter and humour

Mutual recognition

Hannah:

That is what I was going to move onto in a moment, the role of the guide

Peter:

Oh no (both laugh)

(p4)

In the research the more I got to know individuals through group walking practices the less that seemed to need to be said in an interview context. At times laughter indicated a mutual understanding – no clear humorous explanation was required, for alluding to a situation was enough to elicit laughter. In the example above I am pretty sure that Peter and I are thinking of certain guides who can be slow or patronising, for he had complained about these sorts of guides in other contexts outside the interview situation. Peter's 'oh no' needed no further elaboration for me, so I laugh. In another interview Gail and I laugh at the possibility that some of the walking group members may be enjoying my presence more than I had originally anticipated:

Hannah:

I think the Sheffield group is a really nice bunch and they have been really welcoming.

Gail:

Oh they are yeah... and they are probably glad to have a young girl along
(laughs)

Hannah:

(Laughs) Yeah I think so

(Gail, p11)

Gails laughter alludes to unarticulated thoughts. But I laugh because I think I know what she is getting at – young female sighted guides tend to be in demand in the group. Thus, in these two examples laughter indicated some sort of mutual understanding or recognition of a point which required no further articulation between the researched and I. A conversationally dynamic which occurred both in interview contexts and when out walking. However, in other instances I was not privy to all the reasons for the laughter which occurred amongst members of group walks. Thus, I cannot claim to give a comprehensive analysis here.

The unsayable

Brief segments of transcript and bracketed laughter indicate the possible limits of analysing any instance of laughter. While laughter may indicate mutual recognition or a point which need no further elaboration, at times laughter also seemed to indicate a point at which words failed the participant. There was at times a laughter of bafflement or of something which defies explanation. A laugh I am certainly familiar with! For Ted this type of laughter and humour seemed to occur when he was describing how he could sense buildings and bus shelters without the use of sight, he seemed unfamiliar with the term ‘echo-location’ (Arias 1993) and remained somewhat astounded at the skill, laughing at the seeming absurdity of it.

Hannah:

.. do you find yourself more sensitive to anything? I know you don’t suddenly develop supersonic hearing but...

Ted:

Well I always did have good hearing, but it does sense things sometimes, I mean I never realized you could be walking along and know that there was a bus shelter there. Because if you pass a bus shelter or a building you can feel the building (laughs) I don’t know how it works really (laughs – baffled?)
(p4)

Conclusions: Laughter excess and lightness

In this chapter I have shown how walkers with blindness experience and contribute to landscape through their laughter. Laughter reverberates across and becomes the landscape, blurring any neat distinction between the viewing subject and the material landscape. Laughter also has an infectious physiological quality to it which means it can circulate, stretching out notions of the individual rational subject. Amongst the walking groups laughter was also found to express confusion, relieve nervousness, calm anxieties and ease the embarrassments and frustrations of both hiking in the countryside as part of a visually impaired walking group and sitting down for a recorded interview. Laughter and humour worked to transform situations, giving people with blindness and visual impairment a sense liberation from stereotypes of 'the blind' as subjects of pity. Traversing the rough terrain of the material landscape also provoked those with blindness to see them selves and their situation as laughable. In these ways humour and laughter were a form of both expression and suppression. Humour could reveal particular attitudes, understandings and expectations and it could also suppress or transform other more negative feelings.

Laughter opens us into the present moment, it stops us reflecting so much and it stops us '...retreating into our extensive minds' (Greenfield 2002, 155). Thus, laughter was a useful psychological coping strategy for walkers with blindness, a coping strategy that the visual impairment rehabilitation worker who would come out with the walking group seemed to positively encourage. Laughter may also be understood to emerge from and be an indicator of a good humoured disposition; a disposition which is open to others, to the present moment and to the laughable. But when might this laughter and good humoured disposition become problematic? If an affective politics is as Thrift (2004) has suggested about 'cultivating citizens with generous open dispositions' (Chapter 1). Then a good humoured disposition could be a part of that, but we need to think carefully about the precise constitution of any such disposition and what might also be effaced in the performance of 'good-humoured dispositions'. While laughter may be a source of hope (Sclavi, 1994; Forester 2004), laughter can, as Bergson notes, also indicate '....the beginnings of a curious pessimism' (Bergson 1912, 199).. For while a good humoured disposition and laughter maybe handy self work and even appear subversive at times, it also

seems to indicate a degree of powerlessness on the part of participants ‘...a way of coping without actually acting to change oppressive situations’ (Gouin 2004, 40).

Chapter 10 – Conclusions: landscapes of sight-blindness

Conclusions

If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the mean time...

(Massumi 2002, 18)

Key contributions to knowledge

The aim of this thesis has been to explore how landscape is experienced by blind and visually impaired walkers and how we might go about representing those experiences. This focus was imperative given the persistent association of the landscape concept in Britain with a form of distant and objectifying visual apprehension and the resulting exclusion of other forms of knowledge about landscape. Furthermore, while the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) has resulted in researchers of landscape addressing disabled access measures, until now the implications of disability for our actual understandings of the landscape concept have been left largely unconsidered in both landscape and geographic disciplines. This thesis addresses these issues and makes a distinctive contribution to knowledge in these disciplines by representing the experiences of walkers with blindness and thinking through the possible implications of their experiences for theories of landscape and embodiment. While I cannot fully determine what the reader takes from this research (for the potential 'significance' of this research will differ for different research audiences) I wish to make three key claims to originality in this thesis:

Firstly, I have built on work on landscape and the body emergent in the wake of NRT to advocate a distinct approach to interpreting landscape. Landscape is understood to be emergent from a complex and variable mix of 'nature' and 'culture' and people's landscape experience is always understood to be co-constituted with others and the material world. In this formulation of the landscape concept, landscape is never simply a physical substrate (objectivism); no individual self simply projects their pre-formed thoughts and ideas out onto the landscape (subjectivism); nor is landscape to be solely understood as a form of visual ideology (structure). Landscape has no such singular foundation. Rather landscape is understood to be a process and

people's experiences of landscape exist in reciprocal 'becomings' which draw variably from each of these material, embodied and discursive domains. Perhaps one of the best examples of this idea of landscape is found in Chapter 7 on 'seeing and visualizing landscape without sight'. For in this chapter I have shown how seeing is not only dependant on the physical properties of the eye but also light conditions in the environment, cross-modal forms of embodied perception, memory, language, interactions with sighted guides and imagination. Thus, landscape, in this empirical context, comes about through particular forms of visual impairment but also landscape is entailed in a complex inter-weaving of personal embodied experience, the guides' sight and linguistic constructions which fold recursively back and affect how those with blindness people perceive.

Walker's with blindness experiences of landscape are co-constituted with others and the material world. This means that their landscape experience is groundless - it has no one specific foundation. There is no distinct embodied self who is entirely separable from the landscape and there is no discursive or material landscape entirely separable from the embodied self. However, to identify this groundless nature to landscape experience is not to suggest that landscape experience is free floating or relieved of history and politics. Landscape concepts still potentially come with the weight of past representational and discursive associations, even for those who are blind since birth. Therefore, despite the fact that walkers with blindness seem to embody a deconstructive presence in the Lakes and Peaks, areas traditionally valued for their visual scenic beauty (Chapter 1), walkers with blindness often perpetuate associations of landscape with visual apprehension for they participate in a predominantly sighted discourse on the landscape.

These insights into the variable and context dependent ways in which people 'experience' and 'speak of' landscape means that questions remain over what constitutes relevant literature in landscape research. In this thesis I have largely stuck to Anglo-American material and this is both a reflection of the state of the discipline at the moment and a product of what is currently taken to be 'context' in research which addresses concepts of landscape: what Bonnet refers to as '...the naturalization of geographical knowledge as Anglo-American and European knowledge'(Bonnet 2003, 59). However, we can no longer assume that such forms of

knowledge should take priority, either as context or as philosophies which help to underpin our approaches to research. Non-Western literature on landscape, blindness and embodiment may help in thinking beyond our current predominately Anglo-American confines, in ways which I have not had time and space to explore fully in this thesis.

Secondly, the thesis occupies new empirical ground by representing some of the unique experiences, understandings and opinions of members of specialist blind and visually impaired walking groups who visit areas such as the Lake District and Peak District and revealing the specific processes through which landscapes of sight-blindness come about. Walkers with blindness' experiences of the material rural landscape cannot be understood without also understanding how these experiences occur in conjunction with sighted guides (a topic of Chapter 6) and are interpreted through predominantly sighted discourse (Chapters 4 and 8). I have therefore drawn attention to how walkers with blindness and their sighted guides are involved in the co-construction of 'landscapes of sight-blindness'; hyphenating sight-blindness in order to emphasise this co-construction. Specific attention has been given to the inter-corporeal and inter-subjective processes of vision, touch and laughter which have struck me as key elements in blind walker's body-landscape encounters and topics which blind walker's have drawn attention to themselves in interview accounts (Chapters 7, 8 and 9). I have also noted how people with blindness' experiences of walking in the countryside emerge in relation to their specific experiences of their urban, home environment. For walkers with blindness tend to be confined to known routes in the city when walking alone and thus, despite their dependence on sighted guides, they feel a relative sense of freedom when walking in the countryside.

These representations of blind walkers' experiences and the use of their interview testimony is important because it helps to off set the rather 'ablist' literature which has tended to be evident in representations of countryside users (Chapter 4) and representations of landscape as a form of visual apprehension (Chapter 1). The thesis also reveals some of the ways in which the same material landscape is experienced and seen in very different ways. For example, I have found that for people with blindness walking in rural landscapes such as the Lakes and Peaks demands considerable concentration, often directed at the feet. This level of concentration

means that for people with blindness walking becomes more analogous to an adventure sport such as climbing than the Romantic or contemplative modes of walking discussed in Chapter 3. Walkers with blindness must direct their attention to the immediate demands of the terrain and literally feel their way through the body of the guide, the walking cane and their feet and legs (Chapter 6). On long distance walks, in the steep terrain of the Lakes and Peaks, this can be an exhausting and painful process more analogous to the pain experienced by the barefoot walks of pilgrims than the joyful reveries of Romantic poets (topics discussed in Chapter 3). I have also found that walkers with partial sight tend to give priority to modes of looking which allow for navigation rather than appreciation of the terrain. While sighted guides experience a sort of 'seeing for two' when guiding walkers with blindness in the landscape. These forms of 'landscape gaze' differ quite significantly from the eighteenth century inheritance of distant, picturesque modes of looking at landscape discussed in Chapter 1.

In sum, my empirical research material begins to rectify the relative inattention that geographers and other researchers of landscape have given to disabled experiences of the rural landscape. In so doing, the research highlights the inter-corporeal and inter-subjective modes through which we are likely to experience and talk about body-landscape encounters. Many of these insights into our inter-corporeality are not only relevant to the specific experiences of walker's with blindness but to all embodied subjects. This research material also represents an important contribution to literature in 'new wave' Disability Studies (discussed in Chapter 2): Firstly, by showing some of the ways in which research with disabled people can help to inform and challenge theories of the world which are based on an able, individualised notion of embodiment and, secondly, by revealing the ways in which people with blindness manage the 'disabled role' (Porter 2000) through recourse to humour and laughter (Chapter 9).

My desire to honour the testimony of people with blindness means that I largely prioritized themes that they gave voice to in their interview statements. Therefore the research representations are limited in this respect. The themes of touch, vision and laughter have tangible qualities to them which were discussed by the walkers and which have made these themes possible to explore in the research; but sound and

smell are notable in their relative absence from both my field notes and blind walker's accounts of their landscape experiences. Unfortunately this is perhaps indicative of the relatively limited vocabulary we have for these sensations (Howes, 2003) rather than their actual relative importance. Different methodologies would have been required to better elucidate these other aspects of blind walkers' sensory landscape experience, such as, sound recording, 'rhythm-analysis' (Lefebvre 1999) and paying greater attention to developing vocabularies for acoustic and olfactory sensations. However perhaps such methodologies would have detracted from walkers own accounts; accounts which I felt were worth giving space to in the context of this research.

Thirdly the thesis advocates and demonstrates a distinct style of writing landscape research. This style takes inspiration from accounts of experience in the wake of NRT through placing an emphasis on the processual, intuitive and collective aspects of body-landscape encounter, on the limits of personal testimony about embodied experience and on neurobiological insights into the nature of embodied experience. When I first started writing this thesis I was extremely worried about the actual process of writing and about what will be lost in the process. I was told that a thesis is like an ice-burg as much of it stays submerged and we only see the tip. Of course the trouble is knowing what to keep submerged. I have followed an approach to writing social research which places an emphasis not only on the peaks and certainties but the gaps, cracks, fissures and detritus which are part and parcel of the research process. This includes drawing attention to paradox, performance, humour and contradiction in an attempt to expose the ground upon which the researched can make statements about their experience. However, I hope to have avoided the somewhat self-indulgent and overly complex excesses of work which has emerged in the wake of NRT for I think that it is still important to explore and foster spaces in which the researched might also represent themselves. This is particularly important when working with what might be regarded as 'under represented groups' such as those people with blindness. This point brings me to a key tension of this research to be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Reflecting on the research: some key tensions

It is important to recognize that my initial aim to honour the self-reported experiences of people with blindness in order to offset 'ablist' literature on landscape sits in somewhat of a state of tension with insights from NRT. For NRT has resulted in a relative de-valuing of personal testimony in favour of accounts which focus on practice and other unconscious and neurobiological elements of embodied experience. This leaves me with an irresolvable paradox in this thesis. For in Chapter 4 and subsequent empirical chapters, I have shown that there are no authentic, unmediated individual statements about blind experience. In fact we would be naive to take blind testimony at face value - as somehow authentically representing their 'individual' experience. Sight and blindness mutually constitute each other and therefore the landscape experiences of walkers with blindness cannot be distilled from the discursive/ experiential mesh of the sighted. However, as I discussed in Chapter 1, it is important to note how in many research and policy contexts the landscape concept continues to be associated with visual apprehension; loaded with realist visual values and mobilized for conservative political ends (see also Cosgrove, 2003). Given this situation, blind testimony could still be productively put to use to critique approaches to landscape based on a singular, able, sighted embodiment. This means that my ultimate use of blind testimony exists in somewhat of a state of tension with the insights of Chapter 4 which works to critique the perceived authenticity of blind testimony!

What I have realised during the course of this research is that whether I emphasise endorphins or egos, ideology or practice, neurons or speech can be justified, not only out of a sense of fidelity to a research situation, but also for theoretical reasons, political reasons or both. Certainly whenever I attend a conference people seem very interested when I begin to speak of walkers with blindness. To put it in 'non-representational terms' there is an 'affective power' (Ahmed, 2004) to the blind voice and in my reproductions of walkers with blindness' accounts of their experience. This fascination and affective power reflects an interest that the sighted have had in experiences of blindness that dates back to antiquity (Chapter 4). In the forthcoming year, I will give further consideration to how to best mobilize this 'affective power'.

While my research tackles important issues to do with disabled embodiment and knowledge of landscape I think that during the course of the PhD I may have spent too much time dwelling on aesthetic and abstract philosophical issues over and above moral and political issues. This sort of abstract speculation seems to be encouraged by recent iterations of the landscape concept in the wake of NRT, particularly those found in the work of Wylie (2002; 2005; 2006a; 2006b). For example, as I stated in Chapter 2, Wylie and Rose (2006) argue in a recent editorial that the value of the landscape concept is that it gives depth to the 'topological sensibilities' pervasive in recent geographical theorising and '...reintroduces perspective and contour; texture and feeling; perception and imagination' (477). This seems to encourage localized research concerns with the nature of embodied encounter such as those found in my own thesis and publications (Macpherson, 2005) and in the work of Wylie and Lorimer (2003; 2005). It strikes me that Feminist Gillian Rose's (1993, 88) observations on the seductive nature of the landscape concept and the practice of fieldwork in geography continue to be a potentially relevant critique of this work, for in speaking into debates on landscape in the wake of NRT we risk becoming complicit in an aestheticization of aspects of life that could otherwise be treated as moral-political issues (cf. Sayer 2003). This is the seductive power that, non-representational geography and other strands of cultural geography, creates and then must confront.

Through adopting a focus on how landscape comes about through embodied relations I have left other research issues by the wayside which I encountered and I still wonder if morally these were the right ones to have left behind. As they walked on Kinder Scout on a Wednesday, many members of the SVIWG walking group were walking rather than working, and for some their unemployment seemed to be a direct result of their disability. It struck me that just as walkers in the Lakes and Peaks have, for over a century, used walking as an escape from the grind of a weekly job (Chapter 3), equally the walking practices of those who are blind may be understood to at times be an escape from the daily grind of disability. The laughter and good humoured disposition of many of these walkers maybe regarded as a source of hope in this respect; however it also seemed indicative of a curious pessimism about their situation. Laughing and walking were ways of coping with their present situation rather than ways of acting to change problematic features of that situation (Chapter

9). This research project has not focused on the socio-economic reasons why people with blindness were choosing to go out walking and this remains an interesting research question in itself.

NRT has been a useful research approach in so far as it has drawn my attention to the limits of ideology, discourse and representation as forms of explanation in social research and has helped to highlight how a mix of body-brain-culture relations contributed to walkers with blindness' experiences of landscape. However, I think we should also continue to heed the early warnings of Cosgrove (1984) when he wrote that '...in landscape we are dealing with an ideologically-charged and very complex cultural product, one that will not easily yield to fashionable changes in geographical methodology' (11). Otherwise, in the wake of NRT, conceptualizations of landscape in geography risk becoming 'unhinged' completely from the way in which concepts of landscape are actually being used outside the discipline and geographers may miss important audiences for their research by getting bogged down in an exclusive theoretical idealism which speaks only to the 'converted'. Therefore geographers should continue to maintain a dialogue with other academics dealing with the landscape concept from different disciplines.

The embodiment of responsibility

In Chapter 2 I identified a hope, expressed by Thrift (2004), that work inspired by NRT may be orientated toward '...refining the perceptual toolkits necessary to build moral stances' (93). In conducting research in the wake of NRT one particular source of hope for me, in this respect, stems from my experiences acting as a sighted guide for walkers with blindness; for when guiding walkers I moved through and looked at the landscape for two, absorbing into my 'body schema' (Merleau-Ponty 1962) the needs of another person with a different body. This embodiment of responsibility became intuitive and it seems to endorse an approach to understanding the body-subject as co-constituted by the other (Chapter 2). In fact, this co-constitution is a feature of our humanity which is not unique to the practice of guiding walkers with blindness, rather, our co-constitution is clearly evident in a range of parenting and other social roles.

Recognizing our co-constitution (our hybrid self) and the fact that there is no such thing as a wholly individuated self, can fuel frustration, nihilism or scepticism. However, as we noted in chapter two Buddhist philosophies of human experience have long given recognition to our co-constitution and interdependence and in fact this recognition is thought to be the first step to helping foster the Buddhist ideal of 'non-egocentric' compassion. For example, neuroscientist Varela (1993) writes of how we may draw on insights from Buddhism, so that '...an open-hearted sense of compassionate interest in others can replace the constant irritation of egoistic concern' (234). Interestingly, a traditional image of this sense of groundlessness in Buddhism is the sight of a blind man (Varela et al. 1993, 249). It is perhaps the sense of groundlessness that Wordsworth felt on attempting to write of the blind beggar he encountered (Chapter 4) and the feeling that sublime theorists had to confront when attempting to translate their overwhelming landscape encounters into textual description.

For Varela (1993) recognition of the environment, groundlessness and of the other with whom we co-dependently originate may help us foster a set of ethics which are not founded on 'non-egocentric compassion'. However, we must also recognize that the ego (the conscious, thinking subject) is implicated in this very project. In fact, the ego cannot be entirely transcended, rather, we are involved in a permanent struggle with the ego and freedom means very little without some sense of it. This is the paradox of modern freedom. However, what continues to give me some hope is that if we can recognize our co-constitution with others and the material world, this may help us to let go of, at least, some individualistic values in favour of a more compassionate concern for others, fostered not in commodity relations but in caring relations. Recognition of our co-constitution may also help us to stop continually striving for a sense of individuated selfhood, and the inevitable anxiety that any such personal project may create, in favour of more collectivist goals. However, this still leaves many other questions regarding the 'embodiment of responsibility' unanswered, for example, how might we embody a sense of intuitive and habitual responsibility that can stretch over greater distances, to the untouched other? This issue of 'feeling at a distance' is an issue that the landscape concept is still not very useful at addressing, even in its most recent non-representational iterations, perhaps then, this is a matter to be given attention in another research project.

Appendix

Appendix A

Walking Dates and locations

Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group (SVIWG)

All SVIWG Walks are around 7 miles in length

2004

- 11th February – Risleigh to Dale abbey
- 10th March – Hope and the Edale Valley
- 14th April – Wellington Monument and Froggatt Edge
- 22nd April – Walk with Peak Park Rangers from Derwent water up to lost lads
- 12th May – New Mills and walk to Lyme Park.
- 9th June – Rudyard Lake
- 8th July – Walk around Bakewell
- 1st August – Grindleford and the Fox House pub
- 22nd August – Peak Park Rangers Walk, Kinder Scout
- 18th November – Peak Park Rangers Walk, Fairholmes

2005

- 22nd February – Canklow Woods Heritage Trail
- 17th March – Peak Park Rangers Walk, Fairholmes
- 16th April – Curber Gap and the Longshaw Estate
- 9th May – Tideswell, nr. Sheffield
- 23rd June – National Trust Ranger Walk to Bleak Low (Peak District)
- 15th July – New Mills, nr. Sheffield
- 16th August – Lyme Park, nr. Sheffield
- 8th December – Christmas Walk with Peak Park Rangers, Fairholmes

Vitalise walking holidays for people with visual impairments

(previously named the Winged Fellowship Trust)

All walking holidays with Vitalise were a week in length and involved walks of over 9 miles each day with Youth Hostel accomodation

10th-15th August 2004, Traverse of the Southern Lakes

4th-11th September 2004, Lake District Rambles

2nd - 8th April 2005, Langdale Valley and Beyond

Appendix B

Profiles of research participants

Walkers with blindness

Pseudonym	Walking Group	Interview date	Age	Vision	Interview Location
Sarah	Vitalise	08-09-04	30-40	Could see colour, light and dark until about 16. Now totally blind	Hostel bedroom
Bethan	Vitalise	15-08-04	30-40	Began to lose her sight age 7 and since the age of 15 can see hardly anything.	Hostel lounge and garden
Chris	SVIWG	11-05-04	30-40	Visually impaired all his life as a result of optic neuropathy (damage to the optic nerve). In his teens he had some useful residual vision	Cafe
Derek	Vitalise	07-09-04	40-50	Visually impaired all his life, educated as a visually impaired person and now almost totally blind	Hostel lounge
Greg	Vitalise	13-08-04	35-45	Sight until 2 years old but little memory of vision	Hostel lounge
Jim	Vitalise	14-08-04	25-35	Congenitally Blind	Pub garden
Bob	Vitalise	07-04-05	50-60	Congenitally Blind	Hostel lounge
Jenny	Vitalise	06-03-05	50-60	Visually impaired all her life and now almost totally blind Sees light and shadows and bright colours if they are really close.	Hostel lounge

Ben	Vitalise	07-04-05	25-35	Lost the sight in his right eye through being hit by a car and distorted vision with left eye.	Hostel lounge
Ellen	SVIWG	02-08-04	70-80	Hereditary macular degeneration since the age of 15. Some peripheral vision remaining.	Sheffield Visual Impairment Centre
Sally	SVIWG	10-06-04	40-50	Macular degeneration, small amount of remaining peripheral vision	Sheffield Visual Impairment Centre
Ella	SVIWG	28-06-04	25-35	Congenitally blind - does not sense light or darkness.	At her home
Henry	SVIWG	13-05-04	50-60	Sight loss since the age of 18. Now almost totally blind – senses some light and dark.	Sheffield Visual Impairment Centre
Terry	SVIWG	02-08-04	70-80	Retinal detachment	At his home
Ian	SVIWG	02-04-05	30-40	Sight loss since age 11 no longer senses any light or dark	At his home
Bob	Vitalise	13-08-04	40-50	Born with Cataracts, Sight loss at age 7 following an unsuccessful operation	Hostel lounge
Paul	SVIWG	10-06-04	40-50	Totally blind since the age of 12	In a park
Fred	Vitalise	12-07-04	70-80	Blinded from Malaria in his twenties	Hostel lounge

Sighted Guides

Pseudonym	Walking Group	Interview Date	Age	Location
Jess	Vitalise	07-04-05	40-50	Hostel
Dorothy	Vitalise	06-03-05	60-70	Hostel
Anna	Vitalise – Paid Group Leader	13-04-05	30-40	Hostel
Victor	SVIWG	03-04-05	50-60	In a park

Jen	SVIWG	03-04-05	20-30	In a park
Jade	SVIWG – Social Services Rehabilitation Woker	27-06-05	30-40	Coffee shop

Note these interviews occurred in addition to ad-hoc conversations which took place out on walks with both walkers with blindness and sighted guides. These ad-hoc conversations were written up into field notes where appropriate.

Appendix C

Interview Prompts

Interview Prompts for Walkers with blindness or visual impairment

This schedule was a guide for discussion rather than strictly adhered to – the idea was to get participants to talk around their experiences of blindness and walking in the countryside.

Introductions

Thanks for giving up some of your time.

I am investigating the meaning and importance of walking, landscape and the outdoors to people with blindness or visual impairment. The project is part of a 3 year PhD at Newcastle.

Name, address, email

Ensure anonymity and reassure - if you feel you can't answer a particular question then I'm happy to move on.

First, of all is there anything you want to ask me?

Motivations/background

1. How did you get to know about the group / vitalise?
2. Why have you come on this trip / go out with this walking group?
(prompters: exercise, socialising, space, place, hills)
3. Did you know much about this area before you visited?
4. Have you been on other walks?
5. Do you like walking in a group or prefer individuals?
6. Anything else that motivates you come on these walks ?
7. Could you tell me about your history of blindness /partial sight? (Promters: onset, extent of impairment, treatment)
8. How much can you see ? (light/dark, horizon, periphery, tunnel vision?)

9. Did you go walking prior to sight loss? Can you tell me how walking now similar or different than when you had sight?

Experiences

1. What makes for a good days walk?
2. Is it a time when your thoughts can wander? Or does it take a lot of concentration?
3. Can you describe for me how you get a sense of the areas you are walking through?
 - Is sound important?
 - Is touch important?
 - How do you get a sense of space? (prompters : guides descriptions? Echo location?)
 - Are smells important?
 - How do you get a sense of the terrain?
 - How does weather affect your experience of places? Rain/ wind/snow/ hail
 - Is it important to touch things along the way?
 - Do you try and visualise where things are?
4. How do you feel when you get home from a days walking?
5. Is there any places (or landscapes) that you particularly identify with?
6. What do you understand by the term landscape?

Guides

1. What is the role of the guides?
2. What sort of information is useful?
3. What is nice to know?
4. How about Braille and information boards? Other stuff particularly designed for the blind?

5. Are there any particular rural locations that you find particularly good for VIPs? Where and why?
6. Is it important that the guide points out things they can see?
7. Do you have a preference for using the strap or an arm?
8. How do you get a sense of the terrain from what they are doing?

Self-identity

1. Do you understand your impairment as part of your identity ?
2. Do you feel you can identify with other blind and visually impaired people in any particular ways? (In what ways?)
3. Did you go to a specialist blind school?
4. Do you think that you have particular ways of understanding things that might be attributable to your sight loss/blindness?
5. What aspects of being visually impaired might be thought of as being a positive for you?
6. Any books you have read about VIPs that you've enjoyed particularly? Or radio programmes?
7. Any books or radio programmes about hill walking that you have listened to/enjoyed?

Research Issues

1. How would like to hear about the results of this research?
2. How do you feel about people taking photos on the walk?
3. Are you happy for me to use photos/ video from this trip in my thesis, conferences and other research publications?

Interview prompts for sighted guides

Introductions

I am investigating the meaning and importance of landscape and the outdoors to people with visual impairment and blindness and obviously a key part of their experience is the guides, what they do, say and how they feel about the trip. So I was hoping you could tell me a bit more about that, you can be as long winded as you like.

Ensure anonymity

The Guide - Motivations

1. First of all could you tell me about why you came along on this trip?
2. (Prompters - Timing of trip / time of life/ exercise
/volunteering/outdoors/experience new place / difference to home?)
3. Have you taken other trips/ walks with SVIWG/Vitalise?
4. Is there anything special you get out of visiting the Lake District/ Peak District in particular? Why here?

Guiding

5. What do you understand to be your role as a guide?
6. Do you have a preferred guiding style?
7. Do you use any particular techniques to help the person you are guiding avoid obstacles?
8. Do you point out things you can see along the way? What sort of things? Why?
9. How do you feel about the responsibility you have as a guide?

The experience

10. How would you describe your experience on the walks?
11. Are you part of any other walking groups? How does this trip compare to those?
12. How does this sort of trip compare to any other holidays you might take?
13. Do you think of yourself as a tourist on this trip?
14. What do you think people with visual impairments get out of a trip like this?
15. What do you think you personally come away with from a trip like this?
16. Have you any other comments or questions?

Transcript and field note data codes

... Edited Break in text

[...] Pause

(Laughter) Action or sound in brackets

'sighties' Typical participant terms and statements are placed in italics and quotes

Glossary

ANT – Actor-network theory

CBS – Charles Bonnet Syndrome

DDA – Disability Discrimination Act

NRT – Non-representational theory

RA – Ramblers Association

RNIB – Royal National Institute of the Blind

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