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**‘Scapes and Fringes’- engaging with cultural landscapes**

It has become all too fashionable to coin yet another ‘-scape’ (\_*drosscape\_, \_playscape\_, \_smellscape\_*), however, the root-term ‘landscape’ and some of its derivatives do provide useful means of discussing human and environment interactions and their artistic representations.

Landscape is popularly associated with the concept of a painting (or photograph) of a prospect (Dutch \_*landskip\_*) or a view seen in person – a vista. Other interpretations[[1]](#endnote-1) recognise the link between ‘scape’ and the Old English ‘\_*gesceap\_*’ meaning to create or structure, to manufacture ‘landscape’, specifically through farming and forestry, but also other activities such as building (\_*townscapes\_*). Landscapes are a product of human intervention, a cultural construct – both materially and mentally. Humans ‘make’ landscape within the potential that the land affords (resources, environmental opportunities and constraints).

Two specific concepts can helpfully inform thinking about the literary and artistic ‘scapes’ (landscapes, seascapes, townscapes, drosscapes) of Kent. These are Alice Coleman’s ‘scapes and fringes’, and Tim Ingold’s ‘taskscapes’. Both are concerned with the dynamics of landscape.

Coleman created her ‘environmental territories’ as a response to practical issues related to land use survey and planning, but they provide a reminder of the dynamics of land use change that are often the drivers for narratives and images. Coleman divides the land into three ‘scapes’; Townscapes, Farmscapes and Wildscapes (including woodlands), and two ‘fringes’; \_*Rurban Fringe\_* (the zone of tension between rural and urban land uses) and \_*Marginal Fringe\_* (land that may alternate between Farmscape and Wildscape, through incorporation or abandonment of farming). Both scapes and fringes are subject to change; farmscapes experience evolution or even revolutions in technology, economics and policy that change the land and the role of humans therein. While Kent lacks well-known biographers of rural change (Thomas Hardy, George Elliott or Laurie Lee), authors such as Sheila Kaye-Smith, author of \_*Joanna Godden\_* (1921), do deal with agricultural change and innovation and rural transformation – in her case, in the Romney and Walland Marshes.

Even ‘futurescapes’ are not immune. Russell Hoban’s post-apocalyptic vision of Kent is underpinned by the struggle at the marginal fringe between those who live by scavenging, hunting and gathering (people of the ‘fents’ – fortified camps) and those developing an agricultural life (people of the ‘forms’ - farms) that are slowly reincorporating the wildscape into farmscape.

In advocating the idea of the taskscape Ingold[[2]](#endnote-2) argues against the dichotomy of 'naturalistic' versus 'culturalistic' concepts of landscape and for a 'dwelling perspective' in which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of - and testimony to - the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in doing so, have left there something of themselves. Landscape is effectively congealed taskscape – a snapshot of an unfolding process. Ingold echoes the ideas of the landscape historian W.G. Hoskins, whose understanding of landscape was arrived at by striving '…to hear the men and women talking and working, and creating what has come down to us.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Taskscape provides a useful concept to explore how landscapes is re-presented in art and literature as a place of dwelling and sometimes of struggle. Ingold uses Pieter Bruegel the Elder's (1565) painting \_*The Harvesters\_* to illustrate the complexity of taskscape and the complex inter-generational relationship between people, time and place – workers, cornfields, church, pear tree, pathways, hills and so on.

A landscape perspective must, however, be conscious of the larger scale, of regional, national and global processes that bear on localities, from the geopolitical consequences of wars with France on the Kentish landscapes of defence in [Dickens]( /dickens/dickens-biography)’ work to the economic and policy impacts on the urban poor and access to work in Kent’s countryside discussed by Orwell.

1. James Crowden (2005) ‘Landscape: Inscape or Escape?’, in Kate Dunbar (ed.) (2005) \_*Landscape and Literature: A Writers’ Anthology\_*, Green Books: Totnes. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Tim Ingold (1993) 'The Temporality of the Landscape', \_*World Archaeology\_*, 25, 152-174 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. W. G. Hoskins (1967) \_*Fieldwork in Local History\_*, London: Faber, 184; cited in Matthew Johnson (2007) \_*Ideas of Landscape\_*, Oxford: Blackwell, 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)