LOSS AND HISTORY’S PHYSIOGNOMY



An elegy for the UK countryside

Item in the BBC Magazine.

Half a century ago, probably even in the last two or three decades, the UK countryside had a definite purpose.

It was essential to the entire country, because it was where much of our food was produced, which meant employment.

Today we depend on it no more, and so farmers are paid not only to produce herds and harvests but to care for the fields, the wildlife and the landscape.

The UK no longer needs its countryside, except as a park or a rural museum, so it invests less in it than it once did.



I thought of this the light of my recent posts about the physiognomy of contemporary history and Al Bergesen's picture of New York's skyline from the Staten Island Ferry [Link]

It is the old matter of the loss of the rural past – dealt with so well in Raymond Williams's classic City and Country. And this story is saturated in metaphor and intense imagery.

This new relationship in the developed west between city and country is, I am sure, one of the major components of the growth of the heritage industry.

The rural is historical metaphor and point of reference in our sense of the past.



Stonehenge