

CHOROGRAPHY — THEN AND NOW



Chorography – a workshop at Durham University July 10 2012 – [Link]

Summer fieldwork. I am less focused on the excavations at Binchester this year [Link]. I am pulling together my long-running research into the region – the English Scottish borders.

How do you tell of such a place? All that is there, and has been?

For me this is a question of representation that takes me back to the eighteenth century and earlier. To the genre of chorography

writing on the land

– a key component of antiquarian engagements with the history, geography, genealogy, anthropology and archaeology of region, site and collection from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.

Mike Pearson and I call this chorographic effort, among other things, *deep mapping* – [Link]:

“Reflecting eighteenth century antiquarian approaches to place, which included history, folklore, natural history and hearsay, the deep map attempts to record and represent the grain and patina of place through juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the discursive and the sensual; the conflation of oral testimony, anthology, memoir, biography, natural history and everything you might ever want to say about a place ...”

Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (Routledge 2001) page 64-65.

There's more in my new book *The Archaeological Imagination* – [\[Link\]](#) and [\[Link\]](#)

We anticipate a continuing resurgence of transdisciplinary practices that deal with site and region, already so evident in human/cultural geography. To this end Darrell Rohl organized this workshop at Durham. With David Petts, Chris Witmore, Richard Hingley, and myself.

Darrell connected chorography with different kinds of archaeology of place:

- regional archaeological research programs, starting in the nineteenth century, gaining new energy with social and anthropological archaeology developing in the Americas from the 1950s (I think of Gordon Willey's pioneering work in Peru)
- landscape studies, typically rooted in historical geography
- spatial science
- geographic information systems for managing spatially tagged information
- humanistic approaches to the experience of place and typified in archaeology by the influence of phenomenology, including also Richard Bradley's archaeology of natural places
- public archaeology and community involvement

Chorography, given that it doesn't exist as an institutional form, genre or medium any more, is none of these, while also, ironically, encompassing all of their standpoints and agendas, and more. This is precisely due to the genealogy of relationships with place – chorography is the main ancestor of contemporary disciplinary approaches; its genetic imprint is very much with us in modernity.

Here in Durham, and in the wake of my recent return to thinking about theatre/archaeology, my project with Mike Pearson, the figure on my mind was

Brecht



There was much discussion about how to do choreography today – the methods and media, forms and structures, methodologies and publication, about mimesis (whether the aim is some kind of faithful account that somehow mirrors a place, or whether

our discursive efforts are better less concerned with naturalistic rendition, and more with pragmatic purpose).

I have sketched how Scott et al provided *pragmatic* authenticity, one rooted in living and interacting with people and place. Just as Brecht offered definitive tactics of subverting illusions of authenticity by interrupting any illusion of complicity between medium and reality in performance.

Place is a verb. Chorography, in its most radical implication, is not a new archaeology of place. It offers tactics of intervention in the way we (understand how we) live.



The stables at Seaton Delaval (Vanbrugh 1718) – unused since the early nineteenth century