

crisis without crisis'. War and catastrophe still seem necessary for radical political change. That they are *always* insufficient is the lesson I take away from Unger's book.

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Wallach, B. 2005: *Understanding the cultural landscape*. New York: Guilford Press. x + 406 pp. US\$69 cloth, US\$35 paper. ISBN: 978 1 59385 120 0 cloth, 978 1 59385 119 4 paper.

The title of this book is a misnomer. The author confides that his working title was *The great mirror* (additional, colour photos available on <http://www.greatmirror.com>), since the cultural landscape helps us see and understand ourselves as at once successful and destructive. But there is only oblique attention to what a cultural landscape might be. Bret Wallach also claims to identify with the Berkeley tradition, concerned with how people have transformed the earth. Yet he confesses that his interests are not historical but contemporary, and that the first, historical part of the book was written with effort, because it deals mostly with 'things I can't see' (p. 3). Even so he claims to be humanistic, although his presentation ignores place and identity or ethnicity, relegating religion to the pejorative realm of ideology. In other words, he leaves little room for phenomenological or experiential perspectives.

Underlying the lack of a coherent epistemological position is the author's plain contempt for a 'scientific' human geography, enamoured with hypotheses, data and models. Its practitioners are said to 'shun description' and only analyse the 'production' of space, place and memory (p. 3). Instead he prides himself with

the 'factual density' of his book, that seeks to avoid 'generalizations', but stresses 'inter-connections' and reflects a 'philosophy of human ecology' (pp. 3–4). Believing in the lost art of 'pointer-to-board geography' (p. 61), he sees himself as both modern and old-fashioned. Recognition of Wallach's atheoretical approach helps understand the unusual presentation and his reluctance to explain ideas or concepts.

That said, the book displays remarkable scholarly acumen. Part I boldly tackles human evolution, diffusion and cultural change, from the beginnings until almost yesterday. The accuracy and vintage of this difficult material are remarkable. But the choppy style, and wry asides for classroom entertainment, distract from a weakly developed thread of argument.

Part II sets up China and India as implicit alternatives to western civilization, in a morality play where Europe was responsible for setting in motion the train of progress and rationalism. This created a materialistic society dedicated to technological advance, that in turn spurred world exploration, colonization and globalization. The chapter on China, which Wallach knows well, is insightful, and the author uses top-down ideology and monumental architecture to highlight Chinese cityscapes. India is another ancient civilization that survives 'changed but unbroken'. But here Wallach papers over a particularly complicated tableau. Given that the so-called Islamic city was already flourishing during the Bronze Age, as verified archaeologically, the Near East from Egypt to Iran might have provided a productive and more current example.

Wallach is no kinder to Old Europe than was Rumsfeld. He traces time and change in his readings of a few artists and architects, oblivious to the complex growth of chartered cities, with their corporate societies and early preference for participatory government. Francis Bacon and René Descartes, it is claimed, were responsible for the scientific enquiry and radical scepticism that culminated

in Colonialism and unbridled individualism. But Plato and Aristotle could just as well have played such a dubious role as *agents provocateurs* for 'Baconian rationalism'. The prime villains of the twentieth century are claimed to be Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus Schule, which overlooks that small towns across the United States also abandoned gingerbread décor and Queen Anne towers after 1910.

In Part III ('Livelihoods today'), the focus turns to the global economies of production. The welter of facts and statistics recall *The Economist*, in what is a fast-paced economic geography. Part IV turns to 'Social and environmental consequences', the obverse of the globalization coin. On the American home front, the author emphasizes the flight from modernity (my word), conservation efforts, environmental damage and climate change. The density of economic facts from news magazines and the internet is sustained, while the indictment of social injustice becomes more strident. The strongest chapter in turn addresses intimidation by government, migration, the alternatives of reform or revolution, or war and hegemony, as well as failed solutions in the developing world.

'Reading landscapes' (Part V) marks a shift from process to object, namely the juxtaposition of city and rural world, both in the USA and more globally. But, rather than explicate cities and non-cities for the benefit of the reader, Wallach vents righteous anger at architectural planning, greedy corporations, narcissistic consumers or, abroad, on the causes of poverty and squalor. The shadows of globalization and modernization are indeed ominous, but the author seems unwilling to 'inform' and instruct, rather than arouse indignation. Cultural landscapes are not on the agenda, and there is no concluding chapter or paragraph. The book stops abruptly with a comment on cactus rustlers.

As an undergraduate-level text, *Understanding the cultural landscape* is all too idiosyncratic. The author's erudition is splendid, but his anti-scientific stance inhibits his ability to explain and develop even inductive ideas. Although ideas are plentiful, they are abortive amid the mass of data and the cue-card-like presentation. Numbers are no substitute for explanation or heuristic case studies. Wallach's distaste for progress, modernization and development is viscerally ideological, rather than calmly reasoned. His pervasive scorn of individualism, human complacency, consumerism and religion (eg, ridiculing a sacred Hindu ritual, p. 75) is disturbingly simplistic. Wallach does not distinguish between formal (eschatological) and vernacular or popular religion, incorrectly lumping them as 'ideology'. Thus Islamism and Jihadism today are about religion as identity and political mobilization, grounded in ideology, but not in popular or formal religion; the occasional *fatwas* reflect fundamental Muslim ambiguity about whether secular rulership can ever be legitimate.

Western volunteerism in charity, community or Peace Corps work seeks to balance out materialism – whether or not the practitioner attends church. Islam was founded on a similar moral imperative of charity. As anthropologists remind us, communities united by shared values, trust and reciprocity can be a powerful force to redirect citizens of good will to the needs of others. I suspect that appealing to the civic or religious responsibility of human communities, for the sake of the environment and social justice, may be more effective than relentless hectoring. Untempered cynicism about the human condition is not a good educational approach.

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