



## Visuality, mobility and the cosmopolitan: inhabiting the world from afar

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### Abstract

In earlier publications based on the research discussed in this article (e.g. Szerszynski and Urry 2002), we argued that an emergent culture of cosmopolitanism, refracted into different forms amongst different social groups, was being nurtured by a widespread 'banal globalism' – a proliferation of global symbols and narratives made available through the media and popular culture. In the current article we draw on this and other empirical research to explore the relationship between visuality, mobility and cosmopolitanism. First we describe the multiple forms of mobility that expand people's awareness of the wider world and their capacity to compare different places. We then chart the changing role that visuality has played in citizenship throughout history, noting that citizenship also involves a transformation of vision, an absencing from particular contexts and interests. We explore one particular version of that transformation – seeing the world from afar, especially in the form of images of the earth seen from space – noting how such images conventionally connote both power and alienation. We then draw on another research project, on place and vision, to argue that the shift to a cosmopolitan relationship with place means that humans increasingly inhabit their world only at a distance.

**Keywords:** Cosmopolitanism, mobility, visuality, media, dwelling, place, cartographic citizenship

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William Wordsworth's *The Brother* 'signifies the beginning of modernity . . . a time when one stops belonging to a culture and can only tour it'. (Buzard 1993: 27)

The need for a constantly changing market chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere . . . the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a *cosmopolitan* character to production and consumption in every country . . . The individual creations of individual nations become *common* property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible. (Marx and Engels 1952 [1848]: 46–7; emphasis added)

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Electric circuitry has overthrown the regime of 'time' and 'space' and pours upon us instantly and continuously the concerns of all other men [sic]. (McLuhan and Fiore 1967: 16).

## Introduction

In an earlier paper (Szerszynski and Urry 2002) we argued that there were signs of an emergent, spatially dispersed culture of cosmopolitanism, and one that is likely to have significant consequences for economic, social and political relations around the world in the twenty first century. In so doing we were contributing to a growing literature (e.g. Cheah and Robbins 1998; Köhler, Held and Archibugi 1998; Vertovec and Cohen 2002a) that had been exploring cosmopolitanism in a variety of different ways – theoretically, normatively, but also, increasingly, empirically. In that article we drew extensively on our own qualitative sociological research, carried out in the UK between 1996 and 1999, in order to try to give a richer account of both the various forms that contemporary cosmopolitanism is taking, and the social and technical processes and transformations that seem to underlie its emergence.

The more recent literature on cosmopolitanism has emphasized the multiple and contested nature of the concept. Vertovec and Cohen (2002b) have identified six main conceptions of the cosmopolitan: as a socio-cultural condition (see Appadurai 1996); as a philosophical or world view as in Beck's 'cosmopolitan manifesto' (1998); as a political project to build transnational institutions (see Kaldor 1996); as a political project for recognizing multiple identities (see Held 1995); as a mode of orientation to the world (see Hannerz 1990); and as a set of competences which allow one to make one's way within other cultures and countries (see Friedman 1994). Our primary interest has been in the first of these – that is, in what Beck and Sznaider in their introduction to this special issue call the 'cosmopolitan condition' (2006: 1–23) – and we continue this focus in the current article, exploring questions such as: what are the conditions of existence of this socio-cultural condition? What is the impact of multiple mobilities on how the world is 'seen' and 'lived within'?

Nevertheless, we have also been concerned to explore how this socio-cultural condition might also involve particular intellectual and aesthetic orientations towards cultural and geographical difference, and distinctive kinds of competence. Thus, in our earlier article (Szerszynski and Urry 2002: 470), we argued that cosmopolitanism involves a kind of *connoisseurship*, of places, people, and cultures. Cosmopolitan predispositions and practices, we suggested, involve some or all of:

- extensive *mobility*, in which people have the right to 'travel' corporeally, imaginatively and virtually, and for significant numbers also the means to so travel;

- the capacity to *consume* many places and environments en route;
- a *curiosity* about many places, peoples and cultures, and at least a rudimentary ability to locate such places and cultures historically, geographically and anthropologically;
- a willingness to take *risks* by virtue of encountering the ‘other’;
- an ability to ‘*map*’ one’s own society and its culture in terms of a historical and geographical knowledge, to have some ability to reflect upon and judge aesthetically between different natures, places and societies;
- the *semiotic* skill to be able to interpret images of various others, to see what they are meant to represent, and to know when they are ironic; and
- an *openness* to other peoples and cultures and a willingness/ability to appreciate some elements of the language or culture of the ‘other’.

It is important to stress that not all of the features of what Beck and Sznaider (2006: 1–23) call ‘really-existing cosmopolitanization’ are likely to be progressive. For example, some of the more sociological literature on cosmopolitanism has drawn attention to the inequalities between ‘cosmopolitans’ and the ‘rest’; and of course this is only a subset of the more general ways in which multiple mobilities can generate novel, extensive and elaborate forms of social inequality (see Cass, Shove and Urry 2005).<sup>2</sup> However, our concerns in this paper are rather different; we are concerned here with deciphering the complex entanglements of cosmopolitanism with the visual, with mobilities, and with changing forms of ‘being-in-the-world’. If a system of cosmopolitanism is our destiny whether we like it or not, we need to work at what are its implications. And, we want to suggest, one of the more subtle but highly significant implications of the cosmopolitan condition is the way that growing numbers of humans might now be said to ‘inhabit’ their world at a distance.

In the current paper we thus explore the importance of the visual and of mobility in the formation of a culture of cosmopolitan citizenship. We seek to ground the analysis of cosmopolitanism in a theoretically informed analysis of place, vision and movement. We examine how such a citizenship involves a transformation of vision, one that relies on the removal of the self from immediate everyday engagement in the world. We examine the role of multiple mobilities involved in this process of seeing the world from afar, through a cartographic visuality. Is what we might call a cartographic citizenship part of the culture of cosmopolitanism in which many humans are now implicated? What implication might this have for politics and social life?

### Multiple mobilities

Three kinds of ‘travel’ are particularly significant in creating the conditions for a cosmopolitan mode of being-in-the-world: physical, bodily travel, which has

become a 'way of life' for many in Western societies; imaginative travel, to be transported elsewhere through the images of places and peoples encountered in the media; and virtual travel, transcending geographical and often social distance through information and communications technology (see Urry 2000: ch. 3).

Firstly, the scale of physical travel is immense, certainly by comparison with any other period of history. In 2004 there were a record of 760 million legal international tourist arrivals,<sup>3</sup> compared with 25 million in 1950 and a predicted 1.6 billion in 2020.<sup>4</sup> 'Travel and tourism' is the largest industry in the world, accounting for 11.7 per cent of world GDP, 8 per cent of world exports and 8 per cent of employment. Side-by-side with global travellers are 31 million refugees and 100 million international migrants worldwide (Papastergiadis 1999: 10, 41, 54). The most rapidly growing form of smuggling is that of human beings moved across borders, with an associated growth in the international 'slave' trade. Such patterns of physical travel seem to be affecting almost everywhere. The World Tourism Organization publishes tourism statistics for some 220 countries<sup>5</sup>, with almost nowhere not being either or both a significant sender and receiver of visitors, although the flows are very uneven.

Whereas disposable incomes in Western Europe and the USA have increased substantially within the last decades, airfares and the cost of car travel, measured in real terms, have decreased (Frandsen and Vilhemson 2003: 1755; Tarry 2003: 82). People in Britain are physically travelling five times further per year than in the 1950s, and this figure is expected to double again by 2025 (Adams 1999: 12; Vigar 2002). Most journeys taken now were not undertaken at all when cycles and buses were the main forms of travel.<sup>6</sup> From the 1930s to the 1990s commuting distance more than doubled, yet commuting time increased by less than five minutes (Pooley and Turnbull 2000a, 2000b). UK citizens currently make around 1000 journeys a year, a figure that seem fairly constant (Doyle and Nathan 2001). What is clearly the case is that people are travelling further and faster but neither more often nor spending much more time actually 'on the road'. The average daily time spent travelling has remained at around one hour per person for the past three decades, as has the average trip time around 22 minutes (Department for Transport 2004; Lyons and Urry 2005; Schafer and Victor 2000: 271). Fifty-eight per cent of the population in UK undertake long distance journeys, which is slightly higher than the average in the EU (Dateline Consortium 2003: 16).

Secondly, the billion or so TVs de-sever local, national and global worlds through the forms of 'imaginative travel' that they afford. Television has transformed all our 'little worlds' without the need to move corporeally outside one's home (Szerszynski and Toogood 2000; Urry 2000: ch. 3). Dick Hebdige suggests that many people are 'world travellers' through the TV. 'It is part of

being “taken for a ride” in and through late-twentieth century consumer culture. In the 1990s everybody is more or less cosmopolitan’ (Hebdige 1990: 20). This experience is rooted in what Raymond Williams (1974) calls ‘televi-sual flow’ – viewers are thrown into the extraordinary, flowing visual world that lies beyond the domestic regime, an instantaneous mirror (selectively) reflecting the rest of the world then mirrored into people’s homes. Sensations of other places, especially facilitated through channel-hopping and programmes that simulate channel-hopping, create an awareness of extraordinary, fluid interdependence. It is hard not to think that television and travel, the mobile and the modem, seem to be producing a global village, blurring what is present and what is absent, what is public and what is private, what is front-stage and what is back-stage, what is near and what is far (Meyrowitz 1985).

Thirdly, there have always also been forms of ‘virtual travel’, of communication between people who are geographically distant that do not involve personal travel. Today these include letters, postcards, birthday and Christmas cards, telegrams, telephones, faxes, text messages, emails, instant messages and videoconferences. The overall volume of international telephone calls increased at least tenfold between 1982 and 2001 (Vertovec 2004: 223). In 2003, two-thirds of the UK adult population were Internet users. There are now more mobile phones than landlines and, in May 2003, according to National Statistics<sup>7</sup>, 75 per cent of all adults in the UK owned or used a mobile phone, and in 2001 the total number of mobile phones worldwide for the first time surpassed the number of TV sets (Katz and Aakhus 2002). Each month more than 2 billion text messages are sent in the UK. The recent period has thus seen a tremendous increase in virtual travel, due to the emergence of new writing cultures based on emails, weblogs and text messages. The triumph of these new writing cultures seem intricately connected to their fast, frictionless and connective travel through social and geographical space, designed for people on the move.

Various writers have commented upon the likely consequences of such multiple mobilities. Flows of information, knowledge, money, commodities, people and images ‘have intensified to the extent that the sense of spatial distance which separated and insulated people from the need to take into account all the other people which make up what has become known as humanity has become eroded’ (Featherstone 1993: 169). Sensations of other people and places create an awareness of interdependence, encouraging the development of a notion of ‘panhumanity’, combining a universalistic conception of human rights with a cosmopolitan awareness of difference (Franklin, Lury and Stacey 2000; UNDP 2000). Perhaps counterintuitively, then, these multiple mobilities may provide the context in which the notion of universal rights, relating not only to humans but also to animals and environments, comes to constitute a framing for collective action. Illustrations of such panhumanity include the

wide range of what we can call 'global gift-giving', the giving to distant (unknown) others of money, time, objects, software and information or political support (through mega-events like Live Aid and Live 8, local events or the Internet).

But the expanding forms of corporeal, imaginative and virtual travel described above are also transforming the conditions of visibility. John Barrell describes how in the early nineteenth century the mobility of the British upper class throughout Europe provided extensive cultural capital for developing a capacity to imagine what other places were like visually. He argues that 'the aristocracy and gentry . . . had experience of more landscapes than one, in more geographical regions than one; and even if they did not travel much they were accustomed, by their culture, to the *notion* of mobility, and could easily imagine other landscapes' (Barrell 1972: 63). Through physical and then imaginative travel the British upper class expanded their repertoire of landscapes for visual consumption and comparison. In the next section we start to explore how similar transformations in contemporary visibility might be altering the nature of citizenship.

### **Citizenship and the visual**

Visibility has played a number of important roles in the long and complex history of citizenship. Both the citizen, and the sense of a polity of which he or she is a member, have been brought to presence through specific ways of seeing and being seen. Firstly, then, citizenship implies relations of mutual visibility between citizen and citizen. From its emergence in the Greek city-state, citizenship was understood as a mode of human interaction in which individuals could appear to each other, face-to-face, in a public theatre (Arendt 1958). This understanding enjoyed a revival in eighteenth-century Europe with new social spaces, such as the coffeehouse and the salon, in which the (male) bourgeoisie could assemble (Habermas 1989). Secondly, modern citizenship also depends on relations of mutual visibility between the citizen and the state. Citizens have become not just watchers of royal spectacle but also objects of state surveillance and monitoring (Foucault 1977). And in liberal democracies there is an increased demand on public authorities for more rationalized, open and accountable forms of behaviour and visibility. Thirdly, visual symbols are frequently used in totemic fashion to signify membership of a civic or political community (Franklin 2001). Some are official and formal (flags, coats of arms); others are unofficial and arise informally (graffiti, bumper stickers, modes of dress). Some are mobile and carried around on the person (lapel badges, passports, coins); others are fixed, and are to be visited, represented or imagined (monuments, battlegrounds). Fourthly, being part of a community of co-watchers can play an important role in people's sense of themselves as

citizens, through routine, daily events such as the reading of daily newspapers (Billig 1995), through extraordinary, planned events such as sports events or presidential inaugurations (Dayan and Katz 1992), and through extraordinary, *unplanned* events, such as revolutions, disasters, rescues or deaths (see Richards, Wilson and Woodhead 1999).

Of course, contemporary societies are complex entities in which many social relations take place over a distance, rather than through face-to-face interaction, and are often conducted in the currency of abstract, coded information, rather than through visual channels of appearance, speech and gesture (Giddens 1990). Nevertheless, rather than this disembedding and time-space distancing of social relations having *reduced* the role played by visuality in contemporary forms of citizenship, we hypothesized that this role had simply been *transformed*. Furthermore, we wanted to explore whether the transformation of such visual channels through their shift to the media and to communications technology was actually helping to create the cultural conditions for cosmopolitan citizenship (Bauman 1993; Beck 2000; Tomlinson 1999). It was with such questions in mind that we and others at Lancaster carried out our research on the production, circulation and reception of global imagery and narratives in the media.<sup>8</sup>

Using interviews with communications professionals, a survey of broadcast television output, and a series of focus group discussions, we sought to understand the dynamics through which global imagery, narratives and appeals are produced and circulated within the mass media, and the effects that these might be having upon people's senses of themselves as bearers of cosmopolitan rights and responsibilities. In relation to the emergence in earlier centuries of *national* citizenship, Benedict Anderson had brought attention to the crucial 'cultural work' that needed to be done before people could begin to feel themselves to be part of such large political and civic units. Printed books and newspapers, radio and public service television, flags and civic rituals all played important roles in this process – not just by making possible the circulation of information about the life of the nation, but also by providing ways in which people could feel part of an 'imagined community' made up of people they would never meet in places they would never visit (Anderson 1983). We argued that the formation of anything like global citizenship in the twenty-first century would require a comparable amount of cultural work, and suggested that global imagery in the media might be functioning as a vehicle for such work.

There is certainly evidence that the media can play a crucial role in creating the conditions for cosmopolitan citizenship, through both the thematization of difference and the representation of empirical commonalities and universals. Even in Mainland China the massive growth of diverse media is apparently generating a re-cosmopolitanization (Yang 1997; see Ong and Nonini 1997). The Commission on Global Governance, set up to report on the

first 50 years of the UN, talks of 'Our Global Neighbourhood', arguing that a mediated, enforced global proximity is generating cosmopolitanism (UN Commission of Global Governance; Tomlinson 1999: ch. 6; Beck 2000). In the early years of South Africa's move away from apartheid, Nelson Mandela would often refer to 'the people of South Africa and the world who are watching' on their TV screens (UN Commission of Global Governance 1995: 107). The 'we' in Mandela's speeches almost always evoked those beyond South Africa who were viewing it on the global media and were collectively participating in the country's rebirth through an enforced televisual proximity. When Mandela stated that 'we are one people' he was pointing both to South Africa and to the rest of the world, those who were witnessing its travails. Likewise, the pointing from the TV commentators to the collective 'we' at Princess Diana's funeral was to the 2.5 billion people witnessing and sharing on the global screen, as this iconic 'global healer' was sanctified by (almost) the whole world (Richards, Wilson, Woodhead 1999: 3). Indeed, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 there have been various 'global events' when 'The Whole World is Watching' (Gitlin 1980), including highly televised disasters such as the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, the Asian Tsunami of 26 December 2004, and the destruction of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina on 29 August 2005. Such collective global events are key to the forming of such a cosmopolitan culture, perhaps beginning with the founding moment of the Nuremberg trials in the immediate postwar period.

However, there are also ways in which citizenship has always involved something like the *privation* of vision. Citizenship has involved a certain self-absenting from the quotidian social world with its identities, interests and perspectives. To act as a citizen is to think of the good of society in the abstract, and thus in some sense to leave behind one's private identity and interests; and this self-absenting is itself often conceived visually, in terms of seeing from a vantage point that transcends particular locations and narrow horizons. This is even more so the case with cosmopolitan citizenship, in which individuals are expected to transcend their very culture. Such a perspective is perhaps offered by a global view, one that views not locality or nation as the primary area of identification but the world as a whole. We explore this globalizing of vision in the next section.

### **The world seen from afar<sup>9</sup>**

In December 1968, as Apollo 8 completed the first manned circuit around the far side of the moon, astronaut William Anders took a photograph of the distant Earth which came to symbolize the leveling effects of distance on ethical perception. NASA image AS08-14-2383, commonly referred to as

*Earthrise*, was not the first full-Earth image, but it was startlingly clear and received a huge amount of attention when the 70mm film was brought back and developed. Anders says that he prefers to hang the picture as he experienced it – as if he were once again coming around the side of the moon, with vertiginous infinite blackness ‘below’ him, and catching a welcoming sight of the Earth again.<sup>10</sup> However, *Earthrise* is usually reproduced as a conventional nocturnal landscape with a half moon, except for the reversal of landscape and celestial object – all colour is in the celestial orb, not the landscape – and the lack of any stars in the image, which seems to emphasize the isolation of terrestrial life (Cosgrove 1994: 275).

The image quickly enjoyed massive circulation. A few weeks after the flight, Apollo 8 Commander Frank Borman received a telegram that just said, ‘You saved 1968’. The image was used as a backdrop for news and current affairs programmes, and on the cover of *The Whole Earth Catalogue*. It has been widely cited as playing a key role in inspiring the first Earth Day, held in 1970, and in galvanizing the then still emergent environmental movement (Goldberg 1991: 57).<sup>11</sup> Cosgrove quotes at length the essay by the American poet Archibald MacLeish that appeared in the *New York Times* on Christmas Day 1968.<sup>12</sup> It was reprinted alongside *Earthrise* in the May 1969 issue of the *National Geographic*. ‘For the first time in all of time’, McLeish wrote,

men have seen [the Earth] not as continents or oceans from the little distance of a hundred miles or two or three, but seen it from the depth of space; seen it whole and round and beautiful and small . . . To see the Earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the Earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold – brothers who know now that they are truly brothers. (MacLeish 1968)

Here, for once, we seemed to have the perfect icon for the ‘unlimited finitude’ of the earth, and for the panhumanity that dwells upon it (Franklin, Lury and Stacey 2000).

In our survey of a twenty-four hour period of broadcast content,<sup>13</sup> we found numerous examples of such ‘global’ images, leading us to suggest that global imagery was starting to constitute an unremarked, all-pervasive background to people’s lives, one with the potential to reshape their sense of belonging. Television is not important here simply for its cognitive effects or its ideological bias, but in terms of its circulation of symbolic resources, and its flow-like form as a medium. It circulates images and narratives – images of places, brands, peoples and the globe itself, and narratives of various figures, heroes and organizations (see Alexander and Jacobs 1998, by contrast, on the narrative structure of national civil society). Above such content, television also has certain formal, collage-like characteristics that might have the effect of displacing unreflective identification with local and national cultures and placing

them within a far wider context so as to facilitate cultural, emotional and moral encounters with various global 'others'.

Billig (1995) argues that perhaps the most important symbols of national belonging are those of what he calls 'banal nationalism' – the almost unnoticed symbols of nationhood that pepper our everyday lives, from coins and maps to the very use of the word 'we'. In a similar way, we suggested that televisual images and narratives were developing a global equivalent, a 'banal globalism'. Such imagery, we argued, might be helping to create a sensibility conducive to the cosmopolitan rights and duties of being a 'global citizen', by generating a greater sense of both global diversity and global interconnectedness and belonging (Szerszynski and Toogood, 2000; for alternative research, see Savage, Bagnall, Longhurst 2005: ch. 8).

Yet, for all this, the elevated vantage point has also been criticized for its close intertwining with the operation of power. The imperial, 'god-like', cartographic gaze involves the surveying of tracts of land from a privileged vantage point, outside and above the quotidian world (Harley 1992). Might the image of the world from space have embedded within it similar encoding of power? Ingold argues that images of the world as a globe always bear meanings of technological mastery over nature (Ingold 2000: ch. 12, also published as Ingold 1993). Ingold distinguishes two ways of conceiving of the environment – in terms of *globes* (perceived from without) and *spheres* (experienced and engaged with from within) – and suggests that 'the movement from spherical to global imagery is also one in which "the world", as we are taught it exists, is drawn ever further from the matrix of our lived experience' (Ingold 2000: 211). He describes the shift from the pre-modern to the modern as one from sphere to globe, from cosmology to technology, from practical, sensory engagement to detachment and control (2000: 216). He implies that such images must necessarily distort our relationship with nature, positioning us outside a world conceived as pure, passive matter, on the outer surface of which meaning is actively inscribed by the perceiver (2000: 213). Cosgrove (1994) is more sanguine, but notes that representations of the globe have always played a role in the iconography of worldly power – in terms of monarchical rule, bourgeois intellectual and worldly ambition, and the commercial ambitions of corporations today. He suggests that images such as *Earthrise* served a similar function in American iconography, underscoring a distinctively American ideal of global harmony, building on the conventions of missionary cartography with its roots in the idea of universal Christendom.

If Ingold is right, then at least *some* forms of cosmopolitan citizenship may position one outside the world and alienated from it (Sachs 1993). But how might this affect the experience of place? In the early twentieth century, E.M. Forster noted that certain kinds of place appeared nomadic or cosmopolitan in character. He argued that 'London was a foretaste of this nomadic civilization which is altering human nature so profoundly . . . Under cosmopolitanism

... we shall receive no help from the earth. Trees and meadows and mountains will only be a spectacle ...' (Forster 1931 [1910]: 243). Under the cosmopolitan condition, the implication is that nature itself gets transformed into a cosmopolitan spectacle comprised of images of trees and meadows and mountains to be known about, compared, evaluated, possessed, but not, according to Forster, places that can be 'dwelt within'. We explore this further in the next section.

## **Place and vision**

One striking feature of the televisual content that we identified in our survey as denoting or connoting the global was that it did not only consist of mimetic images of the blue earth. What Albrow (1996) calls globality was also suggested in a number of other ways. The simultaneous diversity and moral equivalence of all humanity was suggested through images of the 'family of man' sharing a global product. The distanced view of the Earth as an interconnected whole was connoted through long, often aerial images of generic 'global' environments such as desert, icecap or rainforest, or through images of particular wildlife species that symbolized or indexed the overall state of the environment. The experience of mobility and comparison was implied by images of relatively exotic places that suggested the endless possibilities of global mobility, and by the very experience of televisual 'flow' itself. All of these semiotic instances, albeit often in limited or commodified ways, displayed the sort of transformation of perception we might regard as constituting cosmopolitan citizenship: using particular places, humans or non-humans to signify synecdochally the global as a whole, and inviting comparison between them.<sup>14</sup>

Yet is this abstraction from the local and particular fully compatible with dwelling in a locality? Could it be that the development of a more cosmopolitan, citizenly perception of place is at the expense of other modes of appreciating and caring for local environments and contexts? In order to explore these questions we now turn to focus on some more specific visual aspects of cosmopolitan citizenship: the capacity to appreciate and obligation to protect the distinctive visual characteristics of one's local place. In a related research project we investigated perceptions of local landscape character among different social groups in the coastal plain of West Cumbria in the North of England. As well as trying to determine local residents' attitudes towards possible extensions of woodland in the area, and testing the Internet as a medium for consultation, the project explored the extent to which residents recognized West Cumbria as an area of coherent landscape character. We conducted focus groups in towns and villages across the area, and held an Internet-based public consultation on landscape character that was made available on public terminals in the area and on the wider Internet.<sup>15</sup>

The West Cumbrian coastal plain is of interest, both socially and for its place in what might be called the visual economy of the North of England (see Urry 1995). It is an isolated area, hemmed in by the Irish Sea and the Cumbrian fells, which has relied on single industries, with concomitant periods of economic hardship and social stigma. Its landscape, an historically agricultural one, is marked by traces of formerly important industries – coal mining, iron smelting, ship building, and so on – leaving it problematic in conventional landscape terms, with an intermingling of urban and rural features, and significant areas of disused land. Its status as a landscape to be appreciated in its own right is further compromised by proximity to the highly valued Lake District, and by the presence of high-technology but potentially dangerous industries such as the nuclear reprocessing plant at Sellafield. Its inhabitants suffer from high average levels of social deprivation, with many social groups left under-employed by the passing of mining and heavy industry; at the same time there are pockets of affluent residents, often professionals who have moved to the area from outside, to be directly or indirectly employed by the nuclear industry.

At one level it seems obvious that knowing the distinctiveness of a place must be to know it better, to ‘dwell’ more fully in place. Yet the findings of this project illustrated a tension here. In order to illustrate this we focus on two of the focus groups held in February 1999. For the first, held in a small, affluent rural village close to the Lake District National Park in the central part of the coastal strip, we recruited professional residents. The second focus group was held in a medium-sized, inland ex-mining village with high levels of unemployment and social deprivation, and was made up of mothers in their 30s from ‘under-employed’ families living in social housing. As might have been expected, the first group were far more mobile in terms of distance and frequency of travel, in their history of residence as well as in work and leisure, and had experienced higher levels of education. Most had moved to West Cumbria from elsewhere in the country for employment reasons, but also cited landscape character as a reason for remaining in the area. The working-class women had almost all been born in the area and said they remained because of family reasons as well as the lack of opportunity to move. Their loyalty to their village was compromised by a sense of growing social problems, especially drugs and petty crime.

The two groups had very different ways of talking about the distinctiveness of their local area. The professional group talked about landscape character in ways similar to those adopted by the Countryside Commission and other official bodies (see, for example, Countryside Commission 1998; Countryside Commission and English Nature 1996). When asked to imagine a photograph they might take of the area, they chose characteristically ‘scenic’ images. In a photograph-sorting exercise, and in their general conversation, they readily abstracted out visual properties of landscape, talked about places by

comparing and contrasting them with other places, and did so in a way which abstracted the visual appearance of a place from the people who lived there.

By contrast, the imaginary photographs chosen by the working-class women were attempts to invoke personal memories and associations, for example through an image of the steps on which they all played as children. Their village was not a point in space which happened to possess a certain combination of characteristics; it was simply their village, their 'home'. Their comparative talk about the village was more temporal than spatial, comparing life in the village today with that of the past, using narratives of increasing mobility, loss of community and decline of social mores. Moreover, when the women did talk about their own and other localities in terms of characteristics, these were rendered more in practical than visual terms. They could compare in great detail the kind of housing that was available in different villages nearby, but made little mention of how their area compared visually with anywhere else. Their response to the sorting exercise was to classify the photographs in terms of whether the places shown would be nice locations to have a house. They conceived of the outdoors as a domestic, social space, to be judged by the character of its people and its social relations, and by the practical benefits that it did or did not offer – as a 'taskscape' rather than a 'landscape' (Ingold 2000: 195).

If anything, the professional group made more use of the outdoors; but they favoured activities that depend on the visual properties of landscape, such as walking, bird watching, mountain biking, fishing and diving. The working-class women's use of the surrounding countryside was more tightly focused on practical (dog-walking, walking to school, rabbit-catching) or social activities (camping, picnicking). Their discussion of possible new woodlands made little mention of the visual properties of trees, concentrating instead on the new risks to children that wooded areas might bring. They preferred any available land to be used for new housing or sports facilities rather than woodland.

The professional group seemed almost 'naturally' to employ a cartographic perspective. In a map-drawing exercise they conceived of West Cumbria as a continuous two-dimensional surface that had various characteristics that came and went as one moved about it. The women in the ex-mining village, by contrast, seemed to conceive of the area in terms of radial excursions away from the village to other places, especially other villages and towns. They had great difficulty completing the map-drawing exercise, clearly being unfamiliar with cartographic ways of thinking at that scale. In the terminology for place developed by the philosopher Edward Casey, they experience West Cumbria as a 'region' – as 'an area concatenated by peregrinations between the places it connects' (Casey 1996: 24, quoted by Ingold 2000: 227). In Ingold's terms, they were 'wayfinders', moving around *within* a world, rather than 'map-readers' moving across a surface as imagined from above.

What are we to make of these differences? It is possible to argue that they simply show the uneven distribution of the sort of cognitive capacities necessary for citizenly modes of being-in-the-world. But this does not seem quite right. It is striking how different is the understanding of local distinctiveness promoted by official agencies like the Countryside Commission when compared with that of the non-governmental organization Common Ground.<sup>16</sup> In the Countryside Commission approach, places are an accretion of 'characteristics' according to abstract categories. In effect, the Countryside Commission's approach to place is that of the *citizen*, in whose experience of place there is a moment of self-absenting or abstraction, of seeing it as if from afar or from outside. By contrast, Common Ground encourages the proliferation of vernacular, ideographic and connotative descriptions of local places – place myths, stories, celebrations, personal associations. Common Ground's approach is that of the *denizen* – the person who dwells in a particular place, and has come to know it through moving about *within* it.

Ingold points out that when someone is in an unfamiliar place and is asked 'where are we?' they typically use the abstract, non-indexical language of maps and co-ordinates. But when traveling in a familiar country, the answer is more likely to be the name of a place, accompanied by stories, associations and memories (Ingold 2000: 237). The language of abstract, visual landscape character is a language of mobility and comparison. It is not simply that the privileged, mobile, cosmopolitan sections of society are better at it; the language is itself an expression of a mobile, abstracted way of being (cf. Schegloff 1968). In Heideggerian terms, the working-class women experienced their locality in terms of its equipmentality – its offering of practical affordances (Heidegger 1967). For them the world was *zuhanden*, ready-to-hand, known through use. For the mobile, professional group West Cumbria was apprehended in a way that was closer to the cartographic and professional vision of landscape, for which the land is *vorhanden*, 'present-at-hand', known through being looked at, conceived in terms of objects and predicates, locations and characteristics.

Thus, as places are increasingly 'toured', there is thus a tendency for *all* places in the end to become cosmopolitan and nomadic. The related shift to a *visual* economy of nature – the assumption that nature and place are above all to be looked at rather than used and appropriated – assists this 'de-substantialization' of place. A given locality becomes not a unique place, with its own associations and meanings for those dwelling or even visiting there, but a particular combination of abstract characteristics, which mark it out as similar or different, as more or less scenic or characterful than other places. The pleasures of place come to derive at least in part from the emotions involved in this visual consumption of place. This produces the emotion of movement, of bodies, images and information, of moving over and

across the globe and reflexively monitoring places in terms of abstract characteristics.

The language of landscape and of cosmopolitanism is thus a language of mobility, of abstract characteristics and comparison. It is not just that such mobility is necessary if one is to develop the capacity to be reflexive about landscape. It is also that landscape talk is *itself* an expression of the life-world of mobile groups. The multiple mobilities of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000) have produced a widespread capacity for aesthetic judgment that in turn feeds into and animates global tourism as well as the environmental movement and notions of the cosmopolitan. Yet this is a judgment from afar, not necessarily 'grounded', a judgment possessive and abstract. James Buzard suggests that William Wordsworth's *The Brother* signifies 'the beginning of modernity . . . a time when one stops belonging to a culture and can only tour it' (Buzard 1993: 27). If this is so, then perhaps the 'cosmopolitan moment' represents the completion of the process that started at the time of Wordsworth. Places have turned into a collection of abstract characteristics in a mobile world, ever easier to be visited, appreciated and compared, but not known from within. If our destiny is to become cosmopolitan, perhaps it is also to find pleasure in place only through an unrelenting visual economy of signs.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

In their introduction to this special issue, Beck and Sznaider suggest that it is only when cosmopolitan ways of thinking and perceiving become incorporated into people's identities, rituals and dispositions that the former can become an effective force in the world (Beck and Sznaider 2006: 7–8). Our own research found that this blending of universalistic dispositions and particularistic local cultures does indeed seem to be occurring amongst certain social groups (Szerszynski and Urry 2002: 476). Yet at the same time our current exploration of the relationship between visuality, mobility and the cosmopolitan has suggested that this blending can radically transform the very character of the particular and the local in a way that is not necessarily an unalloyed civilizational gain: that humans are increasingly seeing and experiencing the world from afar, 'at home' only within the multiple mobilities of late modernity.

However, we do not want to appear to suggest that there is an *inevitable* irreconcilability between cosmopolitan openness on the one hand and dwelling in place on the other. Rather, it may simply be the case that we need to explore, both conceptually and practically, alternative kinds of cosmopolitanism in which this tension is avoided or overcome. In a similar vein, Bruno Latour (2004) has called for a form of cosmopolitanism that does not require us to leave our attachments at the door, one in which people are not asked to

detach themselves from the particular – from their particular place, from their particular gods, from their particular cosmos – in order to attain cosmopolitan emancipation. Perhaps we need to fashion such a form of ‘cosmopolitics’ if we are not all to be fated to become mere visitors in our own worlds.

(Date accepted: November 2005)

## Notes

1. The authors would like to thank their colleagues on the two research projects that are drawn upon in the article – Greg Myers and Mark Toogood (‘Global Citizenship and the Environment’) and Sue Holden (‘Public Perceptions of Landscape Character in West Cumbria’) – for the many stimulating conversations about the significance of the projects’ findings. They would also like to thank the anonymous referees for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

2. It is also beyond the scope of this paper to explore the – often violent – resistances to cosmopolitanization that have erupted around the world in recent years.

3. [www.world-tourism.org/newsroom/Releases/2005/january/2004numbers.htm](http://www.world-tourism.org/newsroom/Releases/2005/january/2004numbers.htm) [accessed 9 September 2005].

4. [www.world-tourism.org/facts/eng/vision.htm](http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/eng/vision.htm) [accessed 9 September 2005].

5. [www.world-tourism.org/facts/metho.html](http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/metho.html) [accessed 9 September 2005].

6. Today only 2% of all journeys in the UK are by bike whereas in a bike-friendly country such as Denmark the same figure is 20 % (*Independent* 06/02/05).

7. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=7202&Pos=4&Pos=4&ColRanl=2&Ra> [accessed 9 September 2005].

8. The project, ‘Global Citizenship and the Environment’ ran from November 1996 to April 1999, and was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC – award number R000236768). For more information, see Szerszynski, Urry and Myers (2000).

9. For an extended discussion of the issues explored in this section, see Szerszynski (2005: ch. 10).

10. See cover image of Szerszynski (2005).

11. See [http://nctn.hq.nasa.gov/innovation/Innovation\\_84/wnewview.html](http://nctn.hq.nasa.gov/innovation/Innovation_84/wnewview.html) [accessed 9 September 2005] for a fuller NASA account of the reception of the image.

12. The full essay is available at: <http://cecelia.physics.indiana.edu/life/moon/Apollo8/122568sci-nasa-macleish.html> [accessed 9 September 2005].

13. We conducted a survey of 24 hours of broadcast output on four television channels available in the UK: BBC2, one of the two public service channels paid for by licence fees; ITV, the network of regional UK commercial terrestrial broadcasters; Channel 4, the national terrestrial television channel, focusing on arts and public affairs programmes and minority interests not provided for on ITV; and CNN, the international satellite news network, based in Atlanta, but broadcasting throughout the world.

14. As Jackie Stacey observes, amongst the products of consumer culture the global is often signified by reference to the exotic otherness of particular, often third-world cultures and people (Franklin, Lury and Stacey 2000: 98–109).

15. This research was funded by the Countryside Agency, Cumbria County Council, the Forestry Commission and Lancaster University and was conducted by Sue Holden and Bronislaw Szerszynski. The three focus groups conducted in February 1999 were chosen to be representative of the main types of settlement in the area. The three groups that met in July 1999 were chosen to exhibit differing degrees of

engagement with conservation and consultation, and with the Internet as a communications medium. The Internet consultation ran for 20 weeks, and had 243 visitors over that period (for more information, see Szerzynski and Holden 2000).

16. See <http://www.commonground.org.uk> [accessed 9 September 2005].

17. Although of course diverse other senses get mobilized at the margins, as occasional resistances, as resistant 'bodies of nature' (Macnaghten and Urry 2001).

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