

Evoking Landscape Practices through Ethnographic Fiction

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Abstract

Landscape has long been of central concern to cultural geography. Historically, the conceptualization of landscape rested on discursive binaries of subject-object, culture-nature, and self-other. Recent developments in cultural geography attempt to collapse these binaries through relational ontologies of landscape and a focus on the experience of landscape through practice. Yet, difficulties persist regarding the representation of landscapes, especially given that non-representational and phenomenological approaches have expanded landscape inquiry beyond the singular focus of representation while advocating experimental methodologies and new styles of writing. Recent work in geography has taken up narrative as a way of pushing the boundaries of landscape writing and representation. I continue this work by exploring the conventions and techniques of ethnographic fiction to convey student encounters with the landscape during a three week field course in Southern Colorado. Despite its title, ethnographic fiction is actually a mode of textual representation in creative nonfiction that uses literary devices to interpret data from field work and produce factually accurate accounts concerning the social production of experience and meaning. Specifically, the text conveys meaning by synthesizing story, character, scene/setting, dialog, and a personally engaged author into a compelling narrative about cultural practice. Ethnographic fiction can be adapted to focus on the human experience of landscape through practice, which opens the possibility of exploring recent geographical treatments of landscape interaction in post-phenomenology and non-representational theory through narrative. When applied in an appropriate and critical manner, ethnographic fiction can be an effective genre for evoking the sensuous and ephemeral moments of engaging with landscape through direct experience as well as writing and reading.