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Introduction

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Introduction

My aim in this book study is to explore, examine and compare aspects of the content and form of a series of perspectives on the cultural significance of place and its relations. The relations referred to here are understood in terms of both concepts and of verbal or written discourses or narratives which offer a presentation or interpretation of the significance of place and closely related concepts. The forms of discourse focused on are those of cultural theory and the novel, although a limited consideration of certain aspects of poetry is also included.

Place, as word or concept, has numerous connotations. It usually signifies some sort of fixed point but this fixed point can vary in size and complexity from the head of a pin to the cosmos. Nevertheless, the attendant notion of fixedness means that place, or places, can be invested with both positive and negative meanings. Positive connotations tend to be of security, stability and meaningfulness, negative connotations of oppression, repression and the related desire to escape from the place in question. A common meaning is that of specific geographical location, whether a town, or village, or some other significant part of the landscape, large or small. But there are many others. 'To know one's place' is a phrase usually understood in relation to conservative notions of social hierarchy. A common dictionary definition is that relating to an open space or public square, *the* place for people from a community to meet, do their trading, air their differences and perform festivities. To place something can signify simply to put it in a given position but it can also mean to situate it in a context which gives it meaning — a form of orientation.

Another way of initially considering the meaning of place is by way of contrast with that of space. Space is a concept comparable with place in the broadness of its range of connotations as well as its semantic proximity. If place is suggestive of fixedness, limitation, closure and meaning, space is more suggestive of openness and freedom to move, but also of emptiness and lack of meaning or orientation. This is to deal with notions such as place and space at an introductory level, though both concepts have long and involved cultural and philosophical histories. Edward Casey provides a detailed discussion of the significance of place and related concepts in philosophical thinking from the earliest times up to the late twentieth century in his book *The Fate of Place* (Casey 1997). My intention here is to explore aspects of these concepts in relation to certain preoccupations in later twentieth century thinking and cultural production. This involves an encounter with the other type of relation referred to, that of verbal and written discourse. The discourses in question are referred to in the title as theory and fiction. 'Theory' in the sense that I use it here refers to forms of writing by a variety of thinkers from different academic disciplines and countries. 'Fiction' in this book is restricted to a detailed analysis of aspects of the work of two writers, Raymond Williams and Iain Sinclair, both born in Wales,

one currently commanding a greater reputation as a cultural critic and theorist, the other also a practising poet. Both have developed long-term writing projects primarily focused on the nature and concerns of a particular place or region.

The theoretical and fictional writing discussed here was mostly produced between 1970 and 2000, though some attention is paid to earlier writing where it is considered relevant. Analysis and discussion of the theory is intended, in part, to provide a context for that of the fiction. The cultural theory considered is taken as representative of three broad orientations towards questions of place and its relations. These can be characterised in terms of the emphasis placed, respectively, on questions of social emancipation and justice, questions of difference and its expression and repression, and questions connected to human relations with the earth. The work of the two writers of fiction is partly considered in relation to these categorisations but also in broader terms and in greater detail. In all cases, the primary emphasis is on how the writers considered approach questions of place and its relations and on comparisons between their approaches. A related concern is the question of how the two novelists provide dramatisations of issues raised by cultural theory, as well as by poetry, in ways which offer the possibility of a link between these relatively specialised forms of discourse and more generally accessible forms of cultural production.

It has already been observed that positive connotations of place include a sense of security and stability and that other close relations of place to be considered are those of space, region and the earth. The significance of these categories might be seen as reaching a peak towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century with developments usually included under the general heading of Romanticism. In Wordsworth, the primary paradigmatic figure of British Romantic poetry, place as restorative, wild and unspoilt nature, particularly in the form of his native region, takes on an enormous, positive significance. Wordsworth's approach towards nature and place might be seen as partly indicative of a retreat from a more radical stance towards questions of social and political emancipation taken in the earlier part of his career. In recent times, Jonathan Bate has notably attempted to present the significance of nature in Wordsworth's poetry in relation to the development of an ecologically focused strand of literary criticism (Bate 1991). On the other hand, the notion of places as repressive, haunted, gothic spaces is also a major characteristic of writing produced by politically radical writers, including Blake, whose evocation of a 'chartered' London indicates a closely related side of place as oppressive and constricting. Robert Mighall's study of aspects of later nineteenth century Gothic fiction specifically focuses on spatial considerations (Mighall 1999).

Such perceptions might be related further back in time to attitudes towards the settlement reached in the years after 1688 and their ambivalence towards the values it represented. Modern Britain and its literature, particularly the novel, might be seen as substantially furthering their development at about this time with writers expressing both positive and negative attitudes towards what were perceived as the dominant values of the new dispensation. John Lucas' *England and Englishness* (1990) particularly concerns itself with the way in which English poetry divides it-

self into different attitudes towards such values with a dominant tendency towards a reclusive conservatism that perhaps helps to encourage its decline as an influential form of writing. Patrick Brantlinger, on the other hand, in his study *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit* (1996) focuses on the way in which the move from an aristocratic and religious based cultural economy to a more liberal one based on commerce and finance continues to attract the attention of writers of prose fiction up to the present day. Interpretations of place could include attitudes of dismay and resentment towards what were perceived as modern, bourgeois values of money, commerce and credit, rather than the older ones of inherited land and position and religious faith. Alternative values could also be expressed in terms of a more radically egalitarian politics, as the sentiments expressed in the prose and poetry of radicals from the time of the civil war through to that of Blake and beyond indicate.

Attitudes to place can be seen as expressing sentiments relating both to the earth and to questions of social organization and hierarchy. They can also be related to questions of region and nation. Sir Walter Scott's novels are usually taken as a major contributory factor in the rise of the historical novel and its relation to the return or development of subordinated regions into areas of independent national sovereignity in Europe. The 'revival' of national identities, at the level of literary and other forms of cultural representation, is a significant feature of poetry as well as the novel in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

It is, however, in the twentieth century that radical attempts to connect poetry with place and politics in opposition to developments in both capitalism and imperialism become particularly evident in ways which directly concern the texts under consideration here. The figures of Pound and Yeats stand out as representative in this respect. Yeats presented a notion of the ancient bard as the voice and experience of a revived nation. Pound provided a challenging version of the poet as capable of understanding, using and contesting the language and complexities of modern capitalism. In both cases, these powerful and distinctive voices might be seen as both reactionary and elitist in the epic visions of world history that they provide. They might also be seen as being complemented by the work of Martin Heidegger, a philosopher particularly interested in the poetic element in language and in the degeneration of human relations to the earth. All three writers might be viewed retrospectively as providing reactionary approaches to questions of place and identity in a world increasingly dominated by the flows of international capital and related developments in technology and efficiently bureaucratic, often imperialistic, versions of the state. These three figures have been singled out for mention here, as have Wordsworth and Blake earlier, since they can be seen as influential on the work of Charles Olson, a poet who, in the context of the latter half of the twentieth century, promoted an especially ambitious poetics and politics of place.

Olson, like Pound, perhaps the single most telling influence on his work, presented an epic, historical vision grounded in ferocious antagonism to the values of modern capital as evinced in the workings of the contemporary American nation. Involved in professional politics and politically radical in his earlier verse, Olson

moved, during the course of the three volumes of his later epic, *The Maximus Poems,* published between 1960 and 1970, to a more distanced and mystical, if still politically attentive stance, basing himself in a removed spot, almost literally offshore, in the fishing port of Gloucester, Massachusetts. From there he projected an alternative history of America and an alternative mapping of the world to those provided by the accumulative requirements of modern capital. He would also seem to have been responsible for one of the earliest, relatively consistent uses of the term 'postmodern', as both Hans Bertens and Perry Anderson note in their relatively recent contributions to the apparently endless development of the possible connotations of the term (Bertens 1995:20–21; Anderson 1998 : 7–12) The relevance of both Olson and Heidegger to the arguments presented here is explored in more detail later. At this point, it can be observed that Olson provides an ambitious example of a place-based poetic whose politics are radically anti-capitalist, though not easily identifiable with the extremes of either reactionary conservatism or dogmatic Marxism. At the same time, his work is increasingly exilic and mystical in its approach and is arguably even more intimidatingly specialised than that of predecessors such as Pound. Figures of modernist, bardic nationalism or regionalism also occur in the British context, in the work of writers such as David Jones, Basil Bunting and Hugh MacDiarmid. These writers have influenced more recent developments in British neo-modernist poetry with a focused attention on issues of place, as represented by Allen Fisher, J.H. Prynne and others. I borrow the term 'neo-modernist' from Neil Corcoran's survey of developments in modern British poetry. Corcoran suggests the nature of some of the connections between 'neo-modernists' like Prynne and poets of an earlier generation such as David Jones and Basil Bunting (Corcoran 1993: 176–77). In most cases, though, despite, and perhaps because of, the range and ambition of their work and the potential significance of a place-based politics of difference, radically challenging the dominant conformities of capital and the modern state, a major problem has been that of accessibility to more than a very limited number of readers.

Poetry has not been the only form of discourse to offer alternative mappings of the world and its history to challenge the increasing dominance of both international capital and the centralised state. The twentieth century has seen comparable attempts in cultural theory to challenge what is perceived as the negative influence of capitalist value systems on human societies and their relation to one another and the earth. Many of the most influential early elements of such theorising to be discussed here have their source in countries other than Britain. In relation to the earlier part of the century, Heidegger has already been mentioned. His work is contemporaneous with that of the Frankfurt School and writers related to it. Walter Benjamin as cultural analyst of place in the form of the urban appears as a particularly significant figure, both appalled and fascinated by the production of an alternative form of nature designed along purely commercial principles.

This is not to suggest that elements of a cultural theory of place and its relations were not simultaneously being developed in the English-speaking world, on ei-

ther side of the Atlantic. Ruskin and Morris are perhaps the most currently visible representatives of an alternative vision of social organization which took a strong interest in questions of architecture and urban planning and was developed in later years by figures such as Patrick Geddes and Ebenezer Howard. In the 1960s, primarily in the United States, a new explosion of concern about issues relating to modern urban planning occurred, as indicated by studies such as Mumford's *The City in History* (1960), Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1966) .In the mid-seventies the beginnings of a more general theoretical concern with the social and cultural significance of place and space became more apparent with the appearance of books such as Raymond Williams's *The Country and The City* (1973), David Harvey's *Social Justice and the City* (1973), Henri Lefebvre's *La production de I 'espace* (1974) and Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976). I will consider some aspects of the work of the first three writers mentioned at a later stage, but some consideration of the concerns of Relph's book might be useful at this point.

Unlike the approach of the other three studies referred to, Relph's is not primarily Marxist in orientation and might be considered as a broadening of the approach presented in the objections to modernist urban planning raised in the studies by Mumford, Jacobs and Lynch. Relph's primary concern in the book is with the loss of an adequate sense of place. He furnishes his reader with a list of 'manifestations' of the phenomenon of placelessness. These consist of ways in which places are negatively 'other-directed' by being appropriately beautified in standardised fashion for the purposes of tourism, a process Relph sees as one of turning authentic places into synthetic or pseudo-places. He sees similar processes of uniformity and standardisation at work in the creation of instant 'new towns', suburbs and motorways. He also worries about 'formlessness and lack of human scale' and the 'impermanence or instability of places'. He further suggests that the media, mass culture, big business, multinational corporations, central authorities of the state and the economic system in general are responsible for the development of such tendencies. His characterisation of place, as opposed to placelessness, depends on a distinction between 'outside' and 'inside' and includes factors of time, community, personal or private places, rootedness, care and a sense of place as home (Relph 118–21). His approach to place leans towards, sometimes refers to, Heidegger and in this respect might be regarded as nearing the dubiously essentialistic. At the same time, it usefully and methodically formulates a series of relatively intuitive, 'common-sense' observations.

A later but comparable approach, though with a strong Marxist inflection, is provided in Frederic Jameson's wide-ranging evocations of a postmodern sublime and the need for a form of cognitive mapping (Jameson 1988; 1991). Jameson characterises the socio-cultural fabric of late twentieth century capitalist socio-economic relations as a form of cognitive disorientation which discourages thinking about any one thing long enough to invest it with any critical, historical significance. The world of late capitalism is presented as a huge conspiracy of images which can only be resisted by a determined historical, materialist hermeneutics that can still succeed in

perceiving processes of social exploitation and emancipation in the apparently endless present of late twentieth century consumer capital. The themes of deception and disorientation central to Jameson's depiction of life and culture under late twentieth century capitalism are characteristic of a long tradition of Marxist criticism, and not far away from the scenario of a commercially driven second nature pictured by Benjamin and others in the earlier part of the century. Jameson's observations as a cultural analyst have been complemented by developments in the field of geography. The notion of space as socially constructed rather than neutral perhaps owes as much to the cultural theorist Henri Lefebvre's interventions as to those of geographers but they have subsequently developed it in various ways.

The best known disciple of Lefebvre, in the British and American contexts has been David Harvey. *Social Justice and the City* (1973) charts his progress from a liberal and descriptive approach to urban development to one which, inspired by Marx, takes as one of its major premises that the function of geography should not be merely to describe the world but to change it. Consequently, in the later part of this book and in subsequent publications, Harvey pursued a Marxist analysis of urban development which placed more stress on broader socio-economic processes and their political significance. These analyses developed a distinctly cultural turn with the publication of *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990). The study was one of a number published at around this time by writers of Marxist orientation eager to challenge the notion that the increasing use of the term postmodernity meant that we were entering a new era in which notions of continuity and history had little meaning. In some respects, Harvey's study provided an excellent example of the kind of cognitive mapping for which Jameson had been calling. It provided an overview of relationships between modernism and postmodernism but then placed them in the context of socio-economic developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as presented from a Marxist perspective. The conclusion reached was that postmodernism and postmodernity were no more than subtle shifts in a cynical organization of socio-economic relations. Processes of capital accumulation in the richer parts of the world had been obliged, due to major changes in market conditions, to adapt themselves to more flexible and finely tuned forms of production and exploitation of resources, making them more sensitive to fine distinctions of difference between one area and another.

Harvey's approach included an aggressively polemical attack on celebrations of difference and discontinuity, as presented in the work of a variety of French philosophers, including Lyotard, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari. The immediate attack was on Lyotard's notion of viewing the postmodern condition as one of scepticism towards previously accepted meta-narratives, with Harvey insisting, as Jameson had been in more hermeneutical terms, on the need for a strong narrative to counter that of capitalism and its over-exploitative organisation of social relations. Part of the significance of Harvey's approach stemmed from the fact that, while analyses of the nature of postmodernity were numerous, he presented a perspective from the field of geography, rather than that of literary and cultural studies or sociology. During the

1990s, analyses of the social and cultural significance of space by geographers, began to be a generally more visible phenomenon.

Among contributions to this development was one by Neil Smith, suggesting that one way of approaching a manageable mapping of space as socially constructed was by means of 'scaling places'; that is to say, considering space at different levels, from that of the body, through levels such as home, community, urban and region, to nation and globe (Smith 1993: 102–115). Smith's focus on different levels of socially constructed spatial experience comes out of controversies in cultural geography about the relative significance of space and place as socially and culturally significant phenomena. In 1991 David Harvey gave a paper entitled *'From Space to Place and Back Again'* which raised, for geographers like Doreen Massey, the unnecessary return to a dialogue with what she saw as the mystical essentialism of philosophers like Heidegger (Harvey 1993). Massey offered in place of the dialectical relationship between space and place presented by Harvey, a flexible or progressive sense of place, where, as in her adopted home of Kilburn, boundaries were anything but clearly defined (Massey 1993). However, writers such as Martyn Lee, working in the field of cultural studies, in turn questioned this approach, suggesting that places were strongly defined by their geographical situation and history (Lee 1997) This was an approach partly suggested by Massey's own work in her earlier study, *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (1984), which posited the notion of 'layers' in connection with specific areas and their future possibilities for attracting capital investment (Massey 1995).

The notion of place tends to have stronger support in writers less inclined to Marxist interpretations of space and place and more sympathetic to the continuing significance of Heidegger's views, as was observed in the case of Edward Relph. Nor is it a concept whose significance is observed only by geographers. If space as socially constructed tends to be a notion particularly attractive to Marxist geographers, sociologists and cultural theorists, place is a concept which is of evident significance to writers of poetry and fiction as well as philosophy. Olson's *The Maximus Poems* is one example of this, another is Edward Casey's philosophical history *The Fate of Place* (1997), which suggests that a more holistic notion of place was gradually usurped by more scientific and exploitative notions of space but is now making a comeback, partly due to developments in phenomenology and process philosophy as well as, more recently, in the work of French post-structuralist thinkers from Derrida to Deleuze and Guattari and Irigaray.

Casey raises the question, raised in one form or another by most of the writers referred to here, of how to produce a narrative, or what might also be termed a poetics and politics, which is sufficiently coherent to challenge the exploitative fragmentation of social space seen as characteristic of capitalist social relations but flexible enough to allow for various forms of difference. These range from questions of gender, sexuality, and age to social class, ethnicity and belief, and apply not only to people but to places. In this respect, they are also an ecological question. Nikolas Entrikin, in his study of the recent history of geography as chorology, the study of

place, notes the way in which it occupies an uneasy position between more scientific, objective, analytical aspirations and the need to develop a synthesising humanistic narrative which helps to create as much as analyse notions of place (Entrikin 1991). Cultural philosophers and historians such as Arran Gare and Paul Carter, to focus on two writers whose approach to place will be considered in more detail here, pay particular attention to relations between cultural and philosophical perspectives and human relations with the earth.

In an article on the developing discipline of ecocriticism and its relation to the novel, Dominic Head suggests that the concerns of ecology tend to be predominantly with relations between humans and the non-human environment, whereas those of the novel are usually with relations between people, relations to their environment taking a secondary role (Head 1998: 60–73). Commenting on one of Lawrence Buell's 'requirements for an environmentally oriented work', that 'the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in a natural history', Head observes that 'Raymond Williams' unfinished trilogy *People of the Black Mountains* (in which narrative continuity is supplied by place rather than character) could be read as a major experiment in support of this ecocentric principle, but it is hard to conceive of the novel as a genre reinventing itself in this way.' (Head 1998:67).

People of the Black Mountains is one of the novels which is treated in detail here, as are Iain Sinclair's first two novels. In both cases, it is argued that novels like these might be treated as a bridge between the even more demanding discourses of modern epic poetry and cultural theory and more immediately accessible novels like Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983). Rather than thinking in terms of a single paradigm for the novel, it may be more useful to chart a series of contiguous positions on a more varied, never more than partially completed and constantly changing cultural map. To present such an approach to novels such as those written by Williams and Sinclair is perhaps to spatialise a more historically-oriented perspective which sees them as part of the later phase of an arcane, elitist cultural modernism that would also include Olson's *The Maximus Poems,* and large-scale theoretical works such as Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* or Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. In opposition to this viewpoint, it will be suggested here that it is more helpful to see them as forming useful points of transition between the formal difficulties presented by large-scale, modernist pieces of writing and those which are more accessible to a wider readership. This approach might in itself be seen as a form of literary and cultural ecology, one which insists on the value of interconnected diversity in these areas. The texts by Raymond Williams and Iain Sinclair considered here are usually classified, reasonably enough, as novels but, in the case of at least two of the novels considered, Williams' *People of the Black Mountains* and Sinclair's *Downriver,* there is a considerable divergence from the general norms of narrative organization in the modern novel and an interestingly proximate relation to aspects of twentieth century epic poetry and cultural theory. At the same time, since both pieces of writing are usually classified as novels, some introductory comments relating the genre to

issues of place, space, region and the earth, as with poetry and cultural theory, would seem appropriate at this stage.

Writing about place might be seen in certain respects as intrinsic to the more documentary and voyeuristic aspects of the novel, one of whose characteristics as a genre is to provide accounts of experience otherwise inaccessible to most readers. *Robinson Crusoe* provides an account of a very different place from its readers' native land which appears to endorse the social psychology of its domination by a representative figure of the emerging modern British, Protestant, increasingly capitalist and imperialist state. In other writing, Defoe also provides an extensive tour of the home country and various depictions of its capital, London, soon to be the world's largest and most powerful metropolis. One could go further back in time, to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* to focus on the different kinds of itinerary, spiritual and material, involved in the various tours and journeys made in different novels. The most famous journeys in this respect, again belong to epic poetry, whether Dante's *Divina Commedia* or Homer's *Odyssey*. More recent versions of such journeys, of comparable literary fame, in the English-speaking context would perhaps most obviously include Melville's *Moby Dick,* Joyce's *Ulysses,* or Kerouac's *On the Road*. Clearly, it would not be difficult to provide a much longer list, although the aim here is not to suggest that all the most significant novels of the last three hundred years are concerned with journeys, even if many of them are primarily concerned with providing a representation and interpretation of (a) life's journey.

The interesting distinction between map and journey made by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* is discussed in more detail later, as are the notions of nomadism and lines of flight elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Declan Kiberd, in his reading of modern Irish history and literature, *Inventing Ireland* (1996) an alternative history and mapping of Irish culture in itself, makes use of these and related Deleuzoguattarian concepts. He claims that Joyce, as a writer developing in the context of a nation struggling to gain its independence from British colonialism, is more at ease with the short story than the novel. 'The short story genre promised Joyce an escape, a line of flight from the formal inappropriateness of the novel, which was calibrated to a settled society than one still in the settling.' (Kiberd 1996:330). Kiberd goes on to point out that this promise proved at least partially illusory, but the comparison between story and novel is a significant one, raised also by Benjamin in his essay, *The Storyteller,* where the novel is presented as being primarily a form of information transmission, in contrast to the more open form of discursive structure presented by the tale, which allows the reader to make their own interpretation of what is related (Benjamin 1992:87–89). These observations are of particular relevance to an analysis of both Williams' *People of the Black Mountains* and Sinclair's *Downriver,* since each consists of a series of connected episodes rather than a more unified form of narrative focused on the experiences of a relatively limited number of characters. Joyce's 'novel' *Ulysses,* perhaps the most spectacular example of a challenge to more conventional forms of novel writing, also focuses on the exploration of a particular place, but a relatively well

known place which is only a few years from liberation from colonial rule rather than about to fall under its sway. In these respects, it shares some characteristics with Sinclair's approach to London. Sinclair operates with a more self-consciously gothic, haunted sense of place. He makes connections with a complex tradition of gothic writing about place from the work of early writers of gothic fiction to Stevenson, Stoker, Conrad and other writers who explored the ethnic complexities of the imperial metropolis and, in the case of Conrad, its relation to a broader colonial and economic system. This relation between disadvantaged, paralysed and repressed places and a broader system of socio-ecomomic relations is, again, an element of concern shared by the novels, poetry and theory considered here.

To return to the notion of wandering and the journey in an unknown or partly known place, as opposed to the mapping of a dominated space, both Williams and Sinclair, in the novels considered here, operate with comparable figures, as do many of the writers of the cultural theory. The kinds of movement in place and reflective wandering presented in Williams' and Sinclair's fictional writing offer an alternative form of place creation — one which provides different histories and mappings to those presented by a dominant culture of exploitative, accumulative capital and the needs, in the British context, of a considerably but not totally post-imperial state whose grip on outlying regions and cities may need to be loosened further.

These are issues, and approaches to them, which occur in the theoretical as much as the fictional writing. My consideration and comparison of aspects of cultural theory are intended to provide a global context. They are then related to a specifically British context in connection with aspects of the fictional writing of Williams and Sinclair. In the case of Williams, a single novel, *People of the Black Mountains* is focused on, since Williams' fictional work has been the subject of at least one major study, to which I will make subsequent reference, and it is his last novel which provides a particularly interesting comparison with aspects of modern epic poetry, such as that of Olson. In the case of Sinclair, the focus provided is slightly broader and related more to the earlier work, published at about the same time as Williams' last novel. In the cases of both the theoretical and the fictional writing my primary aim is to outline and consider the significance of both convergences and divergences of interest in the two writers' approaches.

In more general terms, my main objective is to provide a contribution to a more sensitively relational poetics and politics of place, space, region and the earth. As David Harvey points out, developments in the later twentieth century have created a situation where even accumulative capital is highly sensitive to the specificities of place, even if this is for exploitative reasons. The theoretical perspectives explored and compared here are seen as relevant to developing a poetics and politics that can help to shape a global space which is not dangerously over-dominated by ecologically and socially insensitive aspects of capital accumulation but which is also attentive to the dangers of producing essentialistic, nostalgic and reactionary characterisations of place. The fictional writing of the two British authors is presented as potentially occupying a particular, if inevitably shifting, kind of space, close to that of modern

epic poetry and aspects of the theory considered earlier. All of these kinds of writing are ambitious in scope, providing a poetic of a scale sufficiently comprehensive to conceptually challenge the power of global capital and the modern state as potentially negatively homogenising processes, but they also make highly specialised demands on their readers. Novels such as those by Williams and Sinclair, I will argue, complement theory and poetry of the kinds mentioned above but also have the potential to act as a bridge to more generally accessible forms of discourse, from more 'serious' but still considerably popular novels, by writers such as Swift and McEwan, to popular genre fiction, forms of television drama, or elements of other forms of cultural production which have indicated the possibility of developing a greater attentiveness to the significance and potential of place and its relations. Many of these forms have tended to focus primarily on individuals, the family and their relations with the state and other institutions but with a relatively limited degree of specificity with regard to the places, spaces, even regions, in which these relations unfold. The argument presented here is that the perspectives considered might contribute to a more complex and sensitive understanding of and relations between different places or socio-spatial levels. Large-scale and oppositional or subversive works of the kind considered here have the potential to provide substantial if partial mappings and alternative histories of particular areas. These can provide useful connections between such areas and help to negotiate their relationship with more powerful and potentially negative trends in the socio-spatial development and impositions of accumulative capital.