

## **Landscapes in the Frame: Exploring the Hinterlands of the British Procedural Drama**

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**Abstract:** In the wake of the much discussed phenomenon of so-called ‘Nordic Noir’ the significance of landscape in relation to the police procedural has had something of a small-screen renaissance. In this paper I discuss this with specific reference to recent productions set and filmed in Britain. *Broadchurch* (2013) shot in West Dorset, *Southcliffe* (2013) filmed in and around Faversham and the North Kent marshes, and *Hinterland (Y Gwyll)* (2013), filmed in and around the Welsh coastal resort of Aberystwyth in Ceredigion, all share something of a ‘post-Nordic-noir’ family resemblance insofar as landscape and location are themselves presented as central characters, prompting reflection on what these narratives reveal about ideas of place and the role of topography and landscape in the cultural imaginary of the British procedural drama.

**Keywords:** landscape; place; topography; location; crime; Nordic noir.

## **Introduction: landscape in the frame**

Focusing on a selection of recent British television crime dramas, this paper takes as its primary focus the relationship between television, landscape, space and place. Assessed through the lens of what is often described as a ‘spatial turn’ in film and media research (Falkheimer and Jansson 2006; Warf and Arias 2009; Roberts and Hallam 2014), my aim is to put landscape more firmly *in the frame* of critical television studies: to set out what in broader terms I have described as a ‘spatial anthropology’ of moving image culture (Roberts 2012, 2015a), focused on the televisual production and consumption of space.

As will be discussed in more detail below, when it comes to television studies, talk of a ‘spatial turn’ has considerably less traction that it does in relation to studies in film. Although projects such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded ‘Spaces of Television: Production, Site and Style’ (2010-2015) are indicative of welcome moves towards addressing such shortfalls in existing research frameworks, there has not really been a concerted shift towards questions of spatiality in television studies as there has with film.

What is evident in respect of some of the recent (if still nascent) interventions in this area has been that scholarship has in no small part been driven in response to industry trends in which an attention to landscape and location has become an increasingly important element in the production process, as witnessed by dramas such as, for example, *Broadchurch* (ITV 2013-), *Southcliffe* (Channel 4, 2013), or *Hinterland (Y Gwyll)* (S4C/BBC, 2013). In other words, if television studies has been slow to join the swell of those tramping out a path – a ‘turn’ – towards the spatial then the same cannot be said of those working in the industry itself. As with recent developments in the film industry, an increasing focus on the economic and industrial potential of location sites (along with a re-energised service sector in the form of film and television liaison offices, screen tourism

organisations, local cultural heritage initiatives, popular culture and media exhibits in museums, and so on) means a growth in collaboration and partnership between those working in television and those whose remit is to promote, package and commercially exploit the merits of a given town, city or region's location 'offer'. Perhaps 'locative turn' would be a better way of describing this phenomenon; one that points undoubtedly to a shift towards a broader cultural economy of landscape, space and place whereby television productions have engaged with and invested in *location* in ways that have outstripped those that programme makers had formerly availed themselves of.

However, if productions such as *Broadchurch*, *Southcliffe* and *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* can, at least for the purposes of the current discussion, be looked upon as exemplars of this more expansive economy of location (albeit those particular to the police procedural drama – the subject of this special issue), then, at the same time, in their own way they each represent very different engagements with ideas of landscape and setting. Ironically, in instances where productions have serviced (or shown the promise of servicing) a profitable extra-textual engagement with locations and landmarks with which they are associated (as is the case with *Broadchurch* – see below) the less they are likely to 'incite' (Sorlin 1991, in Brunsdon 2004, 64) a more 'authentic' sense of place. The degree to which such productions trade centrally on their tourism and place-marketing appeal can be inversely pegged to their capacity to furnish a 'deeper' (Bodenhamer et al 2015; Roberts 2015b) cartography of place and location.

Another significant factor that inveigles itself into considerations of the landscape and location in the British procedural drama is the influence – and not inconsiderable popularity – of recent Scandinavian crime fiction and the impact of so-called 'Nordic Noir' television on the cultural production of space in productions such as *Broadchurch* or *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* (and to a lesser extent *Southcliffe*). This can perhaps be partly approached by paying attention to ideas of 'north' and 'northernness' in a broader sense than that tied specifically to

discussions of landscape and location in post-*Wallander* or post-*The Killing* television crime drama. However, these supra-national and regional connections are palpably and intriguingly fleshed out in the specific example of Nordic Noir television. As such, it is necessary and instructive to approach the case of British procedural dramas by considering in what ways (and to what extent) their geographical imaginaries bear the imprint of their Nordic procedural counterparts. As a prelude to these discussions it is important to situate the arguments presented in this paper within a discourse which, for the sake of expediency (and despite the caveats highlighted above), we might wish to describe as a ‘spatial turn’ in film and screen studies: to afford some critical consideration to the relationship between television and landscape, and where, in turn, this sits alongside wider theoretical frameworks focused around spatiality and the moving image.

### **Landscape and the moving image: a tale of two Lefebvres**

Given the dearth of studies that take as the starting point the relationship between landscape and television, it is necessary, in the first instance, to come at this by way of studies into landscape and film. In particular, Martin Lefebvre’s (2006) distinction between ‘landscape’ and ‘setting’ provides a useful point of departure from which to push forward discussions that can be put to service more pointedly in relation to the television case studies under consideration here.

By ‘setting’, Lefebvre is referring to the space or environment within which the action and story is played out. The location is instrumental in that it provides a functional space or backdrop against which the actions and motivations of the characters can be drawn and thus more meaningfully contextualised. The main setting of *Broadchurch*, for example, is Broadchurch: a fictional town whose locations look remarkably like those found in the real coastal town of West Bay in Dorset (which is to be expected given that this was where, along

with the town of Clevedon in North Somerset, much of the drama was filmed). Despite the harvesting of the programme setting's semiotic content in order to put the location more firmly on the cultural tourism map of West Dorset (of which more later), the location *setting* exists first and foremost to anchor and provide a performative space for the narrative. There is arguably little in the way of engagement with the *landscapes* of West Bay in ways that confer or harness a sense of place that is intrinsic to its identity as a lived space of dwelling and habitation. Those familiar with the location may, of course, enjoy an enhanced viewing experience insofar as their consumption of the text is leavened with a different set of connotations. But for those for whom the setting is little more than a picturesque but otherwise generic coastal location Broadchurch is merely the sum of its constituent parts: an iconic cliff face and beach, a high street, a church, key residential dwellings, the local newspaper premises, a police station, a guest house, and so on. For Lefebvre, then, setting 'refers to the spatial features that are necessary for all event-driven films, whether fiction or documentary' (2006, 21).

So what, then, of 'landscape' in Lefebvre's analysis? For starters, it is the 'inverse of setting' or 'anti-setting' (2006, 27) by way of an intriguing (if rather opaque) preliminary distinction. The corollary of this is a recognition of the more complex significations and aesthetics that mark out location-as-landscape from location-as-setting; the latter, as we have noted, a comparatively mute engagement with the spatialities that impinge on the narrative and the performative dynamics the 'setting' makes possible. Landscape here has its parallels in the aesthetics of landscape painting insofar as its evocation or *production* in film lends itself to a more contemplative gaze whereby the spectator's perception is cast towards the spaces that constitute what is within and (by negation) what lies beyond the frame.

By this reckoning it could be argued that there is something of a deficit of 'landscape' in *Broadchurch*. Whereas *Southcliffe*, by comparison, could be said to boast locations that do

not merely serve as ‘setting’ but incite the viewer’s interest aesthetically, drawing him or her into its representational spaces in ways that augment rather than merely provide *a setting for* the events that unfold on screen. *Hinterland/Y Gwyll*, on balance, perhaps sits somewhere between the two: more landscape (or less setting) than *Broadchurch* but less landscape (or more setting) than *Southcliffe*.

However, while these categorisations at first glance seem to offer a useful template for analysing the respective treatment of location across the three procedural dramas (discounting the fact that their status as made-for-television dramas already poses a question mark over the relative applicableness of Lefebvre’s *Landscape and Film* as a point of reference), at the same time I cannot help thinking that this all seems a little too neat and static. The ascription of one or other of these spatial concepts does not adequately account for the imbrications of space by which a more processual understanding of landscape might be critically rendered. This is brought home by Lefebvre’s addition of a third term, that of ‘territory’ or ‘territoriality’, which, he argues, is space ‘seen from the “inside,” a subjective and lived space’ (ibid, 52). Confusingly, Lefebvre ascribes the category of ‘territory’ to a ‘sort of space [that] is associated more with cartographers, geographers, conquerors, hunters, but also with farmers or anyone inhabiting or having a claim on a stretch of land, than it is with the artist’ (ibid). One might seek greater clarification here as to what might constitute ‘having a claim on a stretch of land’ or, indeed, who, in terms of agents or social actors, this might potentially extend to.

If we refract Martin Lefebvre’s spatial triad of landscape–setting–territory through the theoretical prism of his namesake, Henri, we can identify both the shortfalls in the analysis offered by the former and the critical efficacy inherent in the framework proposed by the Marxist sociologist and philosopher, as most notably set out in Henri Lefebvre’s landmark tome *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]). ‘Territory’, as fashioned by Martin, would fall

under Henri's conceptualisation of 'representations of space' (or 'conceived space') inasmuch as it is premised on there being an abstraction (for example, a map, model, plan, or aerial/overhead view) by which the cartographer, hunter, or farmer is able to exert his or her power and authority over the space in question (the map, in this sense, very much preceding the territory). To a certain extent, in the case of film and television, 'setting' could also fall within this category if regarded as a space – a 'territory' – over which the director, producer, or location-owner (a local authority or private business, for example) might stake a claim.

Similarly, by conjoining 'territory' with a sense of 'subjective and lived space', (Martin) Lefebvre conflates what, for Henri Lefebvre, are attributed to otherwise distinct categories or ontologies of space. (Henri) Lefebvre's own spatial triad: *conceived space* (a.k.a. 'representations of space'), *lived space* ('spaces of representation'), and *perceived space* ('spatial practices'), is wedded to a dialectical view of space-as-process linked to wider structures of social production and reproduction.<sup>1</sup> For Henri, as part of a socio-spatial dialectics, *lived space* is associated with the symbols and icons that shape subjective understandings and experiences of space in the more phenomenological sense, thus encompassing the real-and-imagined spatialities of *landscape* conceived of as, in Martin Lefebvre's terms (2006, 51), a '*form of being*' (emphasis in original).<sup>2</sup>

In other words, what might be understood as 'setting' or 'landscape' may be more precisely drawn through recourse to the analytical tools that a critical spatial dialectics is able to bring to the process of interpretation. Viewed thus, the spaces we are confronted with on screen are reconfigured *differentially*; that is, as products of a spatial discourse that knits the 'setting' of the drama with the 'landscapes' by which the location-spaces are variously constituted, whether these be aesthetic, formalised, social, cognitive, industrial, economic, material, abstract, rationalised, regional, global, or – more diffusely – 'cinematic' or 'televisual' (insofar as these latter two may be shackled, unproblematically, to the mechanics

of their respective media). Correspondingly, what might be thought of as the *hinterlands of the British procedural drama* are those that are not confined by a representational idea of landscape as a space that, of necessity, exists ‘within’ or as a product of a ‘frame’.

### **Framing landscape and the moving image**

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s discussion of abstract and absolute space in his study of the 1994 film *Before The Rain*, Ian Christie historicizes the spatial analysis brought to bear on the film, arguing that it performs a ‘tutelary’ function in terms of how space is read and compartmentalized: ‘how landscape is politicized as “location” through the filmic process’ (2000, 172). If we think of landscape in the television procedural drama in a similar way then, socially, politically, and economically it is the *performative* significance of landscape that takes centre stage. The aesthetics by which landscape ‘manifests itself in an interpretative gaze’, to quote Martin Lefebvre (2006, 51), is but part of a bigger picture. Indeed, it is the very delimiting mechanics of the ‘frame’ that are the problem, if what it is that the frame ‘frames’ – pictorially and metaphorically – inhibits critical reflection on the production and consumption of representational space in broader terms. What is left out of the frame – the representational spaces that ‘location’ otherwise marginalises – is charged and primed by virtue of its relative absence from a mainstream geo-spatial imaginary.

In this regard, for some, as a medium, it is television itself that needs putting ‘in the frame’. For example, commenting on the limitations, as he sees it, of television in terms of representing landscape, the artist and filmmaker Patrick Keiller notes, rather disparagingly, that the celebrated London gangster film *The Long Good Friday*, was ‘conceived as a TV movie – the locations are used not as spaces, but as signs, in a rather crude semiotic sense. We see A Dock, A Pub, A Church, The River, these all used as objects, not spaces, to denote rather than create the atmospherics of the story’ (2003, 81, emphasis added). In a similar



vein, the writer and filmmaker Chris Petit has suggested that one of his favourite television programmes is BBC's *Crimewatch* because it is specifically about *place* (Brown 1995, 6). As with other programmes that now adopt a similar format, *Crimewatch* features CCTV footage of crimes, as well as reconstructions which often trace in detail the actual locations where crimes have taken place. Despite the proliferation of these and other real-life crime genres what seems notably absent from much of the extant literature is detailed engagement with issues of landscape, place and space (Roberts 2014a, 143). For Petit, like Keiller, the critical imperative is to reflect on the ways in which visual narratives *do not* merely serve up the usual 'semiotic' depictions of places as generic or which are functionally and instrumentally yoked to the production of 'location-as-setting' (landscape as 'paint-by-numbers'). In the case of British film, Harper notes that 'the most intense and resonant use of landscape tends to occur on the margins of British film production' (2010, 158). If, as Harper suggests, 'landscape' is a field that is largely furrowed outside of mainstream moving image culture, then is it the case that television – as an arguably even more denuded medium in this regard – has little to offer those who might wish to turn their critical gaze towards just such areas of analysis? The rather thinly-spread literature on television and landscape seems to offer the suggestion that this indeed might be the case. It is almost as if the consensus view has been that, to all intents and purposes, television just 'doesn't do' landscape.

Writing in 1987, Jacquelin Burgess remarked that scholars have been 'slow to recognize and take up the challenge of landscape representations in film and television' (1987, 1). While the same can no longer be said of film (if it ever could), as attested by a growing multi-disciplinary body of work on landscape and location in relation to film (e.g. Lefebvre 2006, Fish 2007, Porter and Dixon 2007, Harper and Rayner 2010, 2013, Hockenhull 2013, Hallam and Roberts 2014), Burgess's statement arguably still holds weight in the case of television. Woolley's review of the 1980's period drama *Poppyland*, set and

shot in the flatlands of East Anglia, in which he notes how the drama ‘fails to penetrate its setting’ and that its locations ‘are little more than flats and backdrops’ where ‘actors act in front of rather than in it’ (1985, 27), could equally well apply – in cut and paste form – to almost any recent location-based British television drama. Moreover, it is a criticism that upholds (Martin) Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of ‘setting’ (as opposed to ‘landscape’), as if a resigned consensus has it that television is at best a medium that can only ever aspire to the latter (and that such an aspiration is more likely to be realised only by way of the consummatory ‘step up’ to film).

Does it just boil down to a case of ‘size matters’? Burgess, by way of response to Woolley’s comments on the representation of landscape in *Poppyland*, remarks that ‘they [the East Anglian flatlands] do not work well on a television screen precisely because it is too small to convey the sense of space’ (1987, 3). As a medium which trades in the ‘gestural rather than [the] detailed’ (Ellis in Burgess 1987, 3), for Burgess, television is simply ‘not kind to rich contextual images of landscape’ (ibid, 7). If the ‘size matters’ argument does hold water (although, if the same logic were applied to landscape painting, would this correspondingly mean that serious critical attention could only be given to landscapes painted on large canvasses?), then, thirty years on, it is one that can be parked with relative ease by noting that television screens can be, and in most instances are, much larger than those available in the 1980s. In addition, the clarity of image made possible by high-definition and immersive digital technologies means that the ‘detailed’ can now be afforded as much attention as hitherto reserved for the ‘gestural’. Indeed, one need only point to examples of natural history and wildlife programming to get a sense of a phenomenologically detailed and rich depiction of landscape as part of what are now commonplace televisual modes of consumption experience (Bousé 2000; Kilborn 2006; Chris 2006).

But, the question of size and image resolution aside, it is perhaps the very ready-to-handedness and prosaically everyday consumption of landscape through televisual means that underscores why it should prompt closer critical attention.<sup>3</sup> The marginalisation of landscape in television – whether through its routine contraction as ‘setting’ or its downgraded importance in relation to landscape in film – needs to be considered alongside the way landscape and location is consumed as part of everyday cultures of viewing and the role television plays in shaping perceptions and practices of space and place. Given the topographic and locative nature of much television procedural drama – the detective being essentially a *mobile* subject: a figure whose procedural enquiries take her or him to and from specific location points as s/he goes about trying to piece together bits of the narrative puzzle – it is a genre that has much to offer for the purposes of spatial analysis. Indeed, coming at this from a spatial humanities perspective, it is the rationale provided by the procedural drama with regard to questions of landscape, place and space (rather than interest in the genre *per se*) that have informed my own interdisciplinary foray into this subject area.

### **Landscape and crime television: northern noir**

The significance of recent Scandinavian television drama to the discussion of landscape and the British procedural drama is noteworthy on two counts. Firstly, in terms of analyses on questions of spatiality and television it represents a subject area in which the slack with specific regard to landscape has begun to be taken up (see, for example, Peacock 2011, 2014; Waade 2011; Agger 2013; Creeber 2015). Secondly, in the same way that landscape has winged its way from the Nordic regions to productively inform academic discourse on television drama in farther flung locations, so too has its influence left a notable mark on the production aesthetics of dramas set and shot in other European destinations (and beyond).

It is less the formal and generic conventions of so-called ‘Nordic Noir’ drama that need concern us here as it is the way related ideas of landscape ‘travel’ across and beyond national settings. That said, it needs to be noted that ‘landscape’ as a focus of enquiry cannot be easily disentangled from questions of ‘setting’ inasmuch as a sense of place and topographical characterisation feed into the mood, atmosphere and psychological dynamics of the narrative. For Creeber, the genre is defined ‘by a rather slow and understated pace, the dialogue often sparse, monosyllabic and the light frequently muted. While there is clearly action ... its drama also allows for long moments of stillness and reflection’ (2015, 24-5). The setting, in other words, is ‘given space’ to expressively compliment the performative action of the human characters in the drama that unfolds. Landscape, in short, is afforded the role of ‘character’ in ways that distinguish dramas such as *The Killing/Forbrydelsen* (2007-2012) or *The Bridge/Broen* (2011-) from other examples of the crime genre. Visually this often translates to more expansive, immersive or ‘epic’ sense of place and space: ‘more cinematic’, to quote the creator of *The Killing*, ‘Larger pictures. Spaghetti Western stuff’ (in Creeber 2015, 25). However, the acid test for whether the locations in any given drama – irrespective of their ‘cinematic’ or ‘epic’ qualities – qualify as *landscape* or *setting* in the terms discussed earlier, surely needs to be the extent to which they function as representational spaces that reach out ‘beyond the frame’ of the diegetic world of which they are a part and speak to (and of) a more embedded sense of place, locality or region (Roberts 2010). Beyond merely serving as a generic descriptor of a geographic region, of which ‘Scandinavia’ serves as a synonym, the term ‘Nordic’, when appended to ‘landscape’, is denotative of an idea or imaginary of place. The connotative implications are thus wedded to a more complex and socio-culturally contingent reading of Nordic – or ‘Northernness’ – that requires us to venture further than the confines of a given text or genre to engage with a broader and deeper cultural geography and anthropology of place.

The task of unpacking an ‘idea of North’ (Davidson 2005) in relation to Nordic crime drama is not one I am necessarily proposing here (being as it is a line of enquiry that takes us well beyond the remit of this paper). Nor is it my intention to needlessly complicate the process of mapping the connections between the Scandinavian procedural and its British counterparts. The influence of Nordic Noir has unquestionably been a key interlacing factor in the production histories of dramas such as *Broadchurch* (Turnball 2015, 1; Creeber 2015, 27), and, as such, offers a rich seam of research possibilities for the television scholar and cultural geographer alike. However, what does need stressing is the extent to which the specificities of landscape in discussions of Nordic Noir and its influences are rarely pushed further than the ‘gestural’, to cite Ellis once again. That is, landscape – as *setting* – is drawn more attention to than perhaps might otherwise be the case, but in all other respects its significance is limited to its capacity to convey meaning that is emotionally or psychologically expressive. For example, discussing the examples *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* (described as ‘Celtic Noir’) and the Scottish drama *Shetland* (2013-), Creeber remarks that ‘both [are] set amongst eerie landscapes and grey foreboding skies that create a geographical and psychological terrain that is strangely Nordic in tone’ (2015, 27). ‘Nordic’ here functions as a signifier of style<sup>4</sup>; a means by which to categorise or refine a ‘type’ of police procedural by reference to a niche taxonomy which, as illustrated by the label ‘Celtic Noir’, can nevertheless assume more bespoke form. What it does not do is step outside of the hermetic circularity by which the genre itself is ascribed with meaning. To gain a fuller understanding of the way landscape is semiotically or performatively transacted in relation to the ‘Nordic Noir’-infused procedural drama it is necessary to reach beyond landscape-as-setting (and, thus, beyond the limitations of genre and style) and to consider the ways in which landscape and location are configured and consumed as part of the wider socio-cultural production of space.

To these ends, it is worth noting how the respective directors or producers of *Broadchurch*, *Southcliffe*, and *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* each regard the role and importance of landscape in the production process:

The incredible Dorset landscape was immediately embedded into the visual identity of *Broadchurch*. These are characters connected to the natural landscape (the cliffs, the sea, the fields) so we chose locations that showed this world ‘outside’ and allowed us to embrace the changing seasons as the story progresses. (James Strong, director of *Broadchurch*)<sup>5</sup>

Although reference is made to the importance of the Dorset location to the ‘visual identity’ of *Broadchurch*, ‘landscape’ here seems lacking in terms of its own inherent characterisation. Cliffs, sea, fields, the changing seasons – nothing appears especially anchored in the particularities of place and time. The world ‘outside’ is merely a convenient space within or against which the drama is played out. The landscape itself is almost incidental – a dramatic backdrop, yes, but in all other respects characterless. As illustrated in the next section, this rather generic and unremarkable sense of place is well in keeping with that portrayed in the narrative. Despite Creeber’s suggestion that the Dorset setting lends *Broadchurch* ‘a profound sense of place’ (2015, 28), I would argue that the drama bears less of an influence of Nordic Noir in terms of landscape and setting on account of its somewhat incurious and muted engagement with the particularities of place. Landscape, unlike that depicted in, say, *The Killing* or *Wallander*, seems conspicuous by its absence.

By contrast, comments by the director of *Southcliffe* are suggestive of an altogether different approach to landscape, one that is demonstrably far less incurious. Again, as discussed further below, this is borne out by what we see on screen, in this case in the way

the director (Sean Durkin) makes use of the north Kent locations where *Southcliffe* was filmed.

Landscape is really important to me, and setting, and so I read the script and then they told me they wanted to shoot in Faversham and we walked from quayside through the marshes and... it's just incredible landscape. I'd never been in anything like it and I found it really inspiring. You just see the story taking place there. The landscape becomes the backdrop and sets the tone that goes throughout the piece.<sup>6</sup>

What seems evident here is the extent to which the landscape and location impressed itself on the director. More pointedly, it is the way space and time have been purposefully put aside in the form of the pre-production recce that *allows scope for* the landscape to make an impression. The qualities, ambience and character of the marshland setting, as filtered through the embodied gaze of the director, form an important part of the creative process by which the narrative and affective landscape of the drama is moulded into shape. As with the exquisitely crafted and textured sense of place characteristic of films such as *Last Resort* (2001) and *My Summer of Love* (2004), both made by the Polish-British filmmaker Pawel Pawlikowski, *Southcliffe* benefits from time spent closely engaging with the landscape: divining and tapping its emotional topographies; immersing oneself in its flows, currents and energies. If *Broadchurch* exemplifies a certain *instrumentality of place* in terms of its locative aesthetics (setting as resource and commodity), in *Southcliffe* we can evince an *intentionality of place* insofar as something of itself – intangible, slightly inscrutable, extrinsic to the particularities of narrative – is allowed to secrete its way onto the screen (setting as a space for the performatively aesthetic). In this respect it is much closer to the landscape aesthetics of Nordic Noir, although by other measures the Scandinavian connection is perhaps not an

obvious one to make. Surely a keener level of attentiveness to landscape alone cannot be a qualifying determinant of what might be considered ‘Nordic’?

A more instructive approach is to consider the extent to which an idea of the Nordic landscape may connate a sense of ‘otherness’ in ways that are not intrinsically tied to the actual geography of the Nordic countries themselves. In Waade’s study of the BBC production of the Swedish procedural drama *Wallander*, she quotes actor Kenneth Branagh’s observations on the experience of filming in Sweden, where, he notes, there ‘is a *different relationship to landscape... people have this relationship to landscape and climate – they’re much more aware of it than we [the British] are*’. Commenting on the landscapes around the Swedish city of Ystad, Tom Hiddleston, another actor working on the series, observes that ‘it’s such an open, mysterious, ethereal landscape. These big skies and fields of rape and great swathes of pine wood along the coast. *It’s a very different country*’ (in Waade 2011, 54-5, emphasis added). Although these comments are, of course, drawn from direct experiences of filming in Sweden itself, the sense of otherness which they convey seems as much reflective of a disposition towards, or an *idea* of landscape as ‘other’ in a more diffusely geographical sense. I am suggesting that the Nordic influence ‘at home’ may in part be read as a kind of ‘importation of otherness’: landscape viewed, or re-imagined, through a de-familiarising lens. The sheer scale of the landscape (juxtaposed to that of the human presence within it or moving through it) and the sense of openness and peripherality serves as a mechanism by which the affects of place conducive to the procedural genre – an air of mystery, the unknown (or unknowable), fear and uncertainty, a sense of existential disquiet or dread, the disturbingly irrational – can be more palpably felt. Landscape steps into the frame as a character or provocateur not merely as a setting provider. Importantly it is the *noir* rather than the *Nordic* that is of import here. Moreover, it is the liminality of place (Andrews and Roberts 2012) and the otherness of urbanity (whether non-urban, sub-urban, rural) that marks



out the role and significance of landscape in the aesthetics of this new breed of ‘procedural noir’. In the case of *Hinterland/Y Gwyll*, the rural setting and the remoteness associated with the landscape of Ceredigion in West Wales serve as an integral part of the diegetic world that is conjured by the programme makers:

All four stories were really grown out of the landscape... [When choosing locations] We ended up going with Aberystwyth because there is a stark beauty to it. It feels like the last place – it’s the end of the railway line and there’s an inherent drama to it because of that. (Ed Talfan, producer of *Hinterland/Y Gwyll*)<sup>7</sup>

To the extent that, in *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* and *Southcliffe*, the stories can be said to have grown out of the landscape, in *Broadchurch* the opposite is the case. The story, if anything, bears down on the landscape, moulding *it* into shape rather than the other way around. By way of riposte to director Stephen Frears’s depiction of London in the 2002 film *Dirty Pretty Things*, Iain Sinclair remarked ‘Landscape is the story, memory and meaning. You begin there’ (2002, 34). This comment serves equally well in respect of *Broadchurch* insofar as landscape *isn’t* the story – it *doesn’t* begin there. Whatever influence the Scandinavian dramas may or may not have had on the Dorset-set drama, it is less on account of any ‘noirish’ aesthetics of landscape and place. The similarities are arguably more to do with the slow-burn and longitudinal nature of the procedural investigation (which unfolds over the course of eight episodes) and a more deeply woven layer of characterisation (akin to that of a soap opera).<sup>8</sup> Like *The Killing*, the narrative is driven and sustained by events that take place in the aftermath of a single killing. Unlike *The Killing*, place is subordinated to the a priori demands of the story. There is little that otherwise anchors the story *in* place.

Having said that, what *The Killing* and *Broadchurch* do share – and what *does* serve to anchor them in place – is a tourist gaze that has sought to capitalise on the international success of the dramas. In Copenhagen, for example, Agger (2013, 236) notes how the urban topography of *The Killing* provides the setting for local ‘murder walks’ where tourists and others can follow in the footsteps of the detective Sarah Lund. There is also a growing film and television tourism market developing in Ystad and Skåne County in Sweden, fuelled by the success of the *Wallander* stories and series (Hedling 2010; Waade 2011, 47; Reijnders 2010, 2011, 23-24). *Broadchurch*, for its part, is attributed to a ‘sudden surge’ in interest in holidays to Dorset and Somerset and, following the broadcast of the second series in January and February 2015, now boasts a tourist trail (published by the regional tourism agency Visit-Dorset.com) around key locations in West Bay and other sites where the drama was filmed.<sup>9</sup>

### **Landscapes in the frame: a televisual triptych**

A spatial anthropology (Roberts 2015a) of the television procedural drama is less preoccupied with the textual geographies of landscape and location as it is with the way actors (in a broader socio-cultural sense) engage with, perform, imagine, produce and *practice* space and place. As a genre, the procedural provides a rationale for thinking critically about landscape rather than the other way around. In this vein, in the last section of this paper I approach the three case study examples under discussion in the form of short vignettes each designed to convey an expressly *spatial story* that relates the drama in question to key points pertaining to the relationship between landscape, location and setting on the one hand, and the role of the procedural drama in the social and cultural production of space on the other.

#### *Broadchurch*

The plot of the Danish procedural drama *The Killing* unfolds in the days and weeks following the death of a teenage girl. A departure from the high-murder-count plotlines characteristic of dramas such as *Midsomer Murders* (ITV, 1997-) or *Inspector Morse* (ITV, 1987-2000), *The Killing*, like *Broadchurch* which followed it, explores the complex web of relationships and events that fan out from the circumstances of a single killing. In the case of *Broadchurch* the deceased is an eleven-year-old boy, Danny Latimer, whose body is found on a beach beneath the towering cliff face at West Bay in Dorset, the totemic landmark around which much of the drama's touristic appeal and symbolic 'locative' capital is compressed. 'Like Nordic Noir...', Creeber remarks, '*Broadchurch* employs its complex narrative structure to reveal the hidden connections that are at play in society, but hints that those connections may sometimes work on a level beyond all human rationality' (2015, 29). This unattributed causal agent is not pursued with any great vigour or intentionality in *Broadchurch* (if anything, in terms of a web of connections, it is the heavy-handed contrivances of the screenplay and the authorial voice of the writer that has the most sway in determining how we, as viewers, ascribe meaning to the actions and motivations of the drama's key players). More crucially, in respect of *location*, where *Broadchurch* fails to go with any degree of sustained curiosity is the question of agency with specific regard to place. Broadchurch, the town, is presented as little more than the aggregate of the everyday lives and mobilities of the ensemble characters around whom the drama revolves. As a social conceptualisation of space, Broadchurch reinforces a *gemeinschaft* view of a close-knit organic community not unlike that portrayed in the children's television programme *Trumpton* (BBC, 1967). Each of the characters is allotted a key role in terms of their vocational or workaday contribution to what it is that makes Broadchurch (the town) and *Broadchurch* (the drama) come together as a coherent – if somewhat functionalist – whole. This is well illustrated in a scene from episode one of the first series.

The scene in question, which lasts eighty seconds, consists of one unbroken tracking shot that follows the route of Mark Latimer, the dead boy's father, as he walks through the main high street of Broadchurch (the actual location is Clevedon in North Somerset). The scene takes place on the morning after Danny's death, but before the discovery of his body. Mark's journey takes him along a route where, rather conveniently, he encounters almost all of the characters that will go on to play a central role in the story. The tracking shot follows a landscape view looking out across the bay with the beach and cliff (the site of the death) clearly visible in the background (Figure 1). The first people Mark bumps into are the Miller family: Detective Sergeant Ellie Miller (one of the two police officers appointed to investigate Danny's death), her husband Joe Miller (who, as we learn in the final episode of series one, turns out to be the killer), and their son Tom, Danny's best friend. In order of sequence, others whose path he crosses (all, at this point, potential suspects) are: the reclusive and unfriendly (hence suspicious) character Susan Wright; Reverend Paul Coates, the local vicar; Olly Stevens, a journalist working on the local paper, the *Broadchurch Echo*; Maggie Radcliffe, the editor of the *Broadchurch Echo*; Becca Fisher, the owner of a hotel (with whom, as we later discover, Mark is having an affair); and, lastly, Nige Carter, Mark's partner in his plumbing business, who pulls up in a transit van to collect Mark. The scene ends with the van driving away.

Taken as a microcosm, this spatial vignette depicts a landscape reduced to the functional mechanics of setting: space serves as a container or backdrop within or against which social action can be rehearsed and transacted. In terms of its constitutive spatialities, the scene can be thus regarded as paradigmatic of the drama as a whole. The landscape-as-setting (Lefebvre 2006) lacks performativity or any sense of characterisation in its own right or, at least, any that confers an identity beyond that which is instrumental to the workings of narrative and plot. In this respect, Broadchurch (the place) serves as a metonym for itself

insofar as its on-screen identity has become a constituent feature in the off-screen production of space whereby any inherent added-value is extracted for the purposes of place-marketing and touristic consumption. Within the frame of televisual representation, the value of landscape lies in its capacity to provide a setting that services the industrial needs of what is an otherwise run-of-the-mill genre production. Outside the frame, the value of landscape lies in its capacity to service the industrial needs of an increasingly integrated service and consumer economy. Either way, space and place exist in the form of raw material: a pliable commodity that furnishes a setting that owes little to the localised structures of feeling and habitus of place that *Broadchurch* (the town) and *Broadchurch* (the text) effectively hold at bay.



Figure 1. Stills from *Broadchurch* (episode one, series one)

### *Hinterland* (*Y Gwyll*)

As a procedural, the Welsh drama *Hinterland/Y Gwyll*, does not deviate too sharply from the conventions of the genre in terms of its self-contained single episode format. In this respect, closer to *Inspector Morse* than *Broadchurch* or *The Killing* – murders are reported, investigated and solved in the course of each episode<sup>10</sup>. Where it does stand out is in its treatment of landscape. In *Hinterland/Y Gwyll*, the sprawling moors, hills and farmland are as much a character in the stories as DCI Tom Mathias and his team. Long shots of the

detective's car as it makes its way through the Ceredigion countryside accentuate the scale of the landscape in relation to the human protagonists, which are dwarfed by comparison. The locations function as setting, for sure, but in ways that are less instrumentally tied to the demands of the storyline. The spaciousness of the landscape shots parallels that which is allowed to envelop the narrative, which, correspondingly, is less tightly drawn around an ensemble chorus as is the case in *Broadchurch*. As a consequence, the setting – and, by extension, the narrative – feels more open, more pregnant with possibility. The landscape draws us in because *it* holds the key. To solve the mystery – to unlock the narrative – it is necessary to enter into a visual and diegetic space that is co-extensive with that of the Ceredigion landscape itself.

The detailed attention to locations and topographic features that are geographically congruent with the landscapes around Aberystwyth represents a key distinction between the representational spaces of *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* and those of *Broadchurch*. Locations and toponyms that feature in the drama are often clearly identifiable. For example, in the first episode of series one (titled 'Devil's Bridge') a body is found in the deep gorge beneath the bridge at the small village of Devil's Bridge, a picturesque location and well known tourist attraction not far from Aberystwyth.

The importance of the landscape to the procedural investigations is well illustrated in an episode titled 'Night Music'. In a scene where DCI Mathias and his colleagues are in conference back at the police station, we see them pouring over a collection of photographs discovered in the belongings of the victim whose death they are investigating, an elderly man whose body is found in a remote farmhouse. 'The man liked to take pictures, thousands of them', observes Mathias, 'trees, rivers, mountains. Look at them. What's missing?' After a pause he realises it is people: 'Hundreds of images and not one single face'. One of the photographs catches Mathias's eye: a view of a remote cottage nestled in a hollow of the rural

landscape ('That could be anywhere,' a colleague remarks, 'old wrecks like that are ten-a-penny around here, sir').

A later scene has Mathias and his team once again gathered around the table in the investigation room. Their enquiries have since focused in on the cottage from the photograph. The key to the murder lies in the history of the property and ownership of the surrounding land. On the wall opposite to where the detectives are sitting hangs a large map of Wales. On the table the photographs from the earlier scene have now been replaced by an assortment of maps. A series of historical Land Survey maps ranging from the 1940s to 1970s reveal changes in the boundaries to the property. Tal-y-Groes, the (fictional) name of the cottage and farmland, now occupies a much smaller area than before, prompting the team to shift their attention to investigating the reasons for the boundary changes and what links, if any, these might have with the murder. The matching up of the property with the investigation has its visual analogue in the consummatory matching of the photographic representation of the cottage with the actual landscape as perceived by Mathias when he travels to the location in person (Figure 2).

Although *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* has found its way on to the local tourist map (Ceredigion County Council publish a booklet featuring locations from the drama, and an online guide to Aberystwyth includes a map showing the filming locations<sup>11</sup>), where it differs from *Broadchurch* in this respect is a closer engagement with the embedded geographies of place and identity by which the drama is symbolically anchored *in* the landscape. There is far more of a sense of a history and mythology of place that surrounds and infuses the narrative, giving the impression that any subsequent tourism activity might be thought of as more of a 'follow-through' process of discovery, as if, performatively, the tourist is continuing the work of Mathias and his team (to the extent that such work is about unlocking the stories and histories inscribed in space).

What this spatial vignette shows, therefore, is a landscape made up of composite mediations – whether cartographic, photographic, televisual, historiophotic (White 1988) – that function as a prelude or starting point to an interpretative process which is not bound by the limits (and limitations) of the text. To apply Iain Sinclair’s formula once again: Landscape *is* the story, the memory, the meaning. It *does* begin there.



Figure 2. Stills from *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* (episode two, series one)

### *Southcliffe*

In the final example we encounter an altogether different engagement with landscape and setting. *Southcliffe* is shot in and around Faversham and the North Kent marshes on the Thames Estuary. Its storyline is different from that of *Broadchurch* or *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* inasmuch as it is less a whodunit than a whydunit. In the context of a discussion on location, setting, and landscape, this distinction is noteworthy in that it tentatively places landscape itself *in the frame*; not in the pictorial or formal sense, but with reference to questions of motive and causation: landscape as suspect. In other words, to what extent might place and landscape be looked upon as a contributory factor in the actions attributed to a murderer, in this case an ex-soldier whose simmering hatred has festered from a long and troubled relationship with *Southcliffe* itself?



Given the rather grim and bleak associations drawn between the act – a Hungerford-style massacre<sup>12</sup> in a small market town – and the location(s) in which it was set, it is not too surprising that the drama offers less in the way of marketable symbolic capital that local authorities and businesses have been able to exploit for tourism purposes. The *Daily Mail* newspaper ran a story with the headline ‘We wanted Midsomer Murders not Hungerford massacre: Town in uproar over serial killer TV series being filmed on their doorstep’. The article went on to report that ‘Locals believed it would be a murder mystery and would boost tourism’ but ‘Residents are now worried about a tourism backlash’.<sup>13</sup>

The opening, pre-credit sequence of the four-part drama sets the scene in such a way as to place the role of landscape and location at the core of the narrative. A series of atmospheric, mist-laden shots of marshland and creek, a woman quietly tending her garden, a residential street, rooftops, an alleyway between houses – these provide the setting for the violence that simultaneously unfolds (the woman doing her gardening is suddenly shot, elsewhere a man runs through empty streets as gunfire is heard in the background). The duration of each shot, coupled with the unsettling quietude (punctuated only by rifle fire) and the brooding atmospherics create – at the very outset of the drama – a setting in which the landscape itself can almost be looked upon as a protagonist: a malevolence that manifests itself in the very human violence that unfolds but which no less runs like a stain through the environment as a whole.

In a later scene, a journalist who once lived in the town, and who has returned to report on the killing, soaks up the bleak atmosphere of the marsh landscape as he reflects on his experience as a child growing up in the area (Figure 3). ‘The flatness of the light does weird things to your eyes. We used to scare ourselves with these stories about these creatures that used to run across the marshes: *striders*’. ‘I bet it was great as a kid’, his partner remarks. ‘It was shit as a kid. It’s shit now’. The other journalist unfolds an ordnance survey map of

the area on which the killer's murderous route through Southcliffe has been marked in red pen. The map is an otherwise faithful rendition of the actual ordnance survey map for the area, with some of the nearby town names, such as Oare, remaining unchanged. Ham Marshes are the same in both real and fictional map, but the large expanse of marshland to the north of Faversham/Southcliffe, Nagden Marshes, is renamed Southcliffe Marshes. During this conversation reference is made to Derrick Bird, the taxi driver who shot dead twelve people in Cumbria in 2010 in a similar random killing spree.

Read against the representation of landscape in *Hinterland/Y Gwyll*, this spatial vignette reveals certain similarities: 1) reference is made to *layered histories* of place in the form of the embedded memory of the journalist; 2) attention is drawn towards the mechanics of mediation (in this case, the role of television news coverage and the localised recollections of the journalist); and 3) the value of cartographic knowledge is emphasised – maps become a crucial part of the investigative and interpretative process. There are also similarities in the way an immersive and site-specific engagement with location and setting allows for a more textured rendering of landscape in both dramas. If, in *Hinterland/Y Gwyll*, an authenticity of place characterisation is more pronounced (the landscape 'playing itself' more), in *Southcliffe* a different form of authenticity is evident, one more grounded in an experiential poetics. Landscape, in *Southcliffe*, is reflective of a liminal and existential sense of place that is not necessarily tied symbolically to the north Kent marshland setting, but which has nonetheless been conjured or procured from a landscape that in all other respects is very real, very tangible, and, as a touchstone of a post-Iraq socio-political malaise, still very raw.



Figure 3. Stills from *Southcliffe* (episode three)

### **Conclusion: wrapped in plastic**

What we might understand and interpret as landscape across the three procedural dramas is the product of different ‘framings’. Each speaks to a production of space and place from which it is possible to harvest a critical geography of television that has its application in precincts that stretch beyond both the localised settings of the examples under discussion and the generic and narratological particularities by which they are defined as procedural dramas. Crime is of note here only insofar as it provides a spatial rationale on which to hang a wider set of concerns relating to the spatial practices and textual performativities by which place (symbolically resonant, a wellspring of mythopoeic narrative, history, memory) is crafted from space (abstract, rationalised, *utopic*, processual). The detective is a figure whose procedural journeys – at their best – are often as much about divining and re-tracing the contours of space and place as they are about solving the murder. To a certain extent, and in their different ways, this is precisely what characterizes both *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* and *Southcliffe*. Conversely, in the case of *Broadchurch* – and in this respect it can be looked upon as an exemplar of *most* UK procedural dramas – it is space that is being crafted from place. A reverse process of geographical engineering sets this drama apart from the other two discussed in this paper. Landscape is edged out of the frame (to make way for setting) and ‘the frame’ itself is substituted as the dominant space of representation. All else must get into

line (into frame) as if dalliance, or a more open (less territorial) command of locale and location, risks undermining the order of things in some way. Aspect ratio as spatial discipline? *Broadchurch* (or rather Broadchurch) as a metaphor for the state as a neoliberal autocracy? A rationalisation of spatial and cultural lives that are otherwise less yoked to a coercive framework of narrative-cum-market? Perhaps, but whatever meta-theoretical observations might be drawn from this example, what can be said is that, while Broadchurch may be a town that is ‘wrapped in secrets’ (to cite the tagline from the DVD artwork of series one), it is no less a town that is ‘wrapped in plastic’ (to borrow from David Lynch’s ‘procedural’ drama *Twin Peaks*). The real murder mystery is not the death of Danny Latimer. It is the suffocation of *place* by the televisual abstraction of *space*.

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## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, from a Marxist perspective, one of Lefebvre’s considerable theoretical legacies has been to extend the temporal dialectics of Hegelian historical materialism to geography and spatiality.

<sup>2</sup> For a selection of film and cultural studies texts that have drawn on Henri Lefebvre’s work, see Dimendberg (2004), Highmore (2005), Roberts (2012, 2014b), Fraser (2015).

<sup>3</sup> See Carter’s study of representations of landscape on Australian television (1998, 125).

<sup>4</sup> According to Jensen and Waade (2013, 262), this style can be characterised by the use of colours ‘in the blue and grey end of the scale, climatic elements such as rainy cold autumn days, and bleak urban cityscapes, reminiscent of the film noir genre’.

<sup>5</sup> Broadcast (2013), ‘Behind the Scenes: Broadchurch, ITV’, [www.broadcastnow.co.uk/features/broadchurch-itv/5052431.article](http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/features/broadchurch-itv/5052431.article) (accessed 17 November 2015).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Southcliffe: Behind the Scenes’, DVD extras, *Southcliffe* (Channel 4, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> BBC Wales (2013), ‘Hinterland: creating stories out of the landscape’, [www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/wales/entries/85b0ac24-e7bc-3486-8240-8e899e63d2c5?sortBy=HighestRating&sortOrder=Descending&filter=none](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/wales/entries/85b0ac24-e7bc-3486-8240-8e899e63d2c5?sortBy=HighestRating&sortOrder=Descending&filter=none) (accessed 17 November 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Jensen and Waade (2013: 262) cite the importance of gender – single mothers leading successful careers, women in power, fathers taking maternity leave – as one of the contributory factors by which to account for the popularity of dramas such as *The Killing* or *The Bridge* in the UK. However, in terms of influence, this translates less seamlessly to the UK examples under discussion here (with the possible exception of *Broadchurch*).

<sup>9</sup> “‘Broadchurch effect’ sees tourist interest in Devon and Somerset soar’, *The Telegraph*, 12 January 2015: [www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/uk/southwestengland/11340128/Broadchurch-effect-sees-tourist-interest-in-Devon-and-Somerset-soar.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/uk/southwestengland/11340128/Broadchurch-effect-sees-tourist-interest-in-Devon-and-Somerset-soar.html) (accessed 4 November 2015); ‘Broadchurch – ITV’s gripping drama filmed on location in West Bay’, *Visit-Dorset.com*, January 2015: [www.visit-dorset.com/dbimgs/Broadchurch%20Trail%202015%20version.pdf](http://www.visit-dorset.com/dbimgs/Broadchurch%20Trail%202015%20version.pdf) (accessed 4 November 2015).

<sup>10</sup> The length of each episode varied depending on which network it was being broadcast. Series one, which was produced in 2013, was filmed back-to-back in both Welsh and English. The Welsh version was broadcast on the Welsh-language channel S4C in eight parts. The bilingual version was broadcast on BBC Wales (and, later, on BBC4) in four parts. At the time of writing a second series is receiving its first airing on S4C in autumn 2015. See [https://www.s4c.co.uk/ygwyl/e\\_index.shtml](https://www.s4c.co.uk/ygwyl/e_index.shtml) (accessed 13 November 2015).

<sup>11</sup> See: [www.discoverceredigion.co.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Y%20Gwyll%20Hinterland.pdf](http://www.discoverceredigion.co.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Y%20Gwyll%20Hinterland.pdf) (accessed 13 November 2015); [www.aberystwyth.org.uk/more/hinterland-filming-locations.shtml](http://www.aberystwyth.org.uk/more/hinterland-filming-locations.shtml) (accessed 13 November 2015).

<sup>12</sup> This refers to the shooting dead of 16 people in the Berkshire town of Hungerford in 1987 by gunman Michael Ryan, who then turned the gun on himself. See: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungerford\\_massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungerford_massacre) (accessed 13 November 2015).

<sup>13</sup> See *Daily Mail*, 27 July 2013: [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2379985/Southcliffe-We-wanted-Midsomer-Murders-Hungerford-massacre-Town-uproar-serial-killer-TV-series-filmed-doorstep.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2379985/Southcliffe-We-wanted-Midsomer-Murders-Hungerford-massacre-Town-uproar-serial-killer-TV-series-filmed-doorstep.html) (accessed 13 November 2015).

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