

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark sweater and light-colored trousers, and is leaning against the trunk of a large tree in a forest. The background shows more trees and a slightly hazy atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Forest landscapes: Affective Embodiment, Identity and Materiality

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Abstract: This paper will suggest that new affect based understandings of place and landscape in a range of social science approaches can be of great use to the forestry policy community in understanding of how individuals and communities engage with forest spaces in imaginative and in embodied (practical) terms, and also in how the complex composition of forest spaces (as cultural, ecological, political, economic, and living entities) can be appreciated. These ideas are connected to questions of wellbeing and social benefit through the ways people construct their individual and collective identities in terms of sense of self and sense of place. The paper will critical review innovative, theoretical and methodological approaches to place, landscape and heritage which have been developed in recent years in geography, anthropology, sociology and elsewhere (e.g. Ingold, 2000; Jones 2008; Massey, 2004; Pearson, 2006; Thrift, 2008, 1999; Whatmore, 2002; Wylie, 2007), in order to introduce these approaches into forestry management conversations about place, landscape and visitor engagements with them. These approaches to people/place/landscape focus upon a range of affective processes which are often ignored by, or simply inaccessible to, standard social science concepts and methods (e.g. visitor survey techniques). These new approaches treat places/landscapes as complex temporal-spatial-material processes into which social, cultural, and symbolic meaning entwine. Peoples' engagement with (differing) places is articulated through a range of affective bodily practices such as walking, sitting, climbing, doing (voluntary work) sensing (touch, sight, sound, smell), and a range of non-cognitive affective processes (feelings, emotions), which are not necessarily articulated or articulatable in thought and/or language. Thus these approaches can be seen as post-phenomenological as set out in Ingold's dwelling approach (2005) and Thrift's 'ecologies of place approach' (1999, 2008). These approaches do not deny or ignore the significance of economy, culture, rationality (management), language and reflexive thought (which are reached by standard social science methods), but stress that much of the richness and import of human interaction with place, landscape and heritage is articulated through a range of other embodied processes and practices. Places are seen as specific, always changing (over a range of timescales) articulations, in which that specificity and the material forms they take (buildings, landscapes) have a 'liveliness' which pushes onto the social (as well being constructed by the social). These approaches move away from simple notions of social construction to see the interactions of people and environment as complex co-constitutive processes. In turn these new approaches to thinking about place require a new set of methodologies which draw up visual ethnography (Pink 2001, Rose 2001), ethology and even performative /a action research techniques (Law, 2004; Pearson, 2006; Stuart, 2007).

The basic point of this presentation is to say that there is what is being termed an “affective turn” in the social sciences. This turn

- demands a very different set of readings of what the social is, how it functions and how it relates to the material (non-human) world
- draws upon (and demands) a very different set of intellectual (philosophical) backgrounds
- and demands an adjusted set of research methods and ideas of how meaningful knowledge can be generated

I think this turn might be PARTICULARLY significant for thinking about peoples’ engagements with landscape/place and forest and wooded environments both individually and collectively.

“Advocates of affect offer it up as a way of **deepening our vision of the terrain we are studying, of allowing for and prioritizing its ‘texture’,** in Eve Sedgwick’s words (2003, p. 17). This texture refers to our qualitative experience of the social world, **[and] to embodied experience that has the capacity to transform as well as exceed social subjection.”** (Hemmings, 2005)

((A One Day Colloquium: School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University Friday 26th March 2010, Organized by ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Networks))

Geographies of Affect, Woodward and Lea (2010)

What is Affect?

A complex and contested term but ...

Affect comprises of a) the systems of the body which enable us to function as meaningful beings and to engage with the world and each other, most of which are pre/beyond consciousness and reflexive thought/language; b) the 'channels' that these engagements occurs through; and c) the traffic on those channels.

Emotions are vital elements of affective processes (but the two are not synonymous).

An alternative philosophical / scientific pedigree (Spinoza, Darwin, Deleuze) to that of modernism/rationalism, which never bought into the whole Descartes derived notion of the self as pure, separate, rational mind.

Seeing human (selves) as complex embodied animals not as virtual minds, and humans as 'dividuals' rather than 'individuals' .

There are plenty of important and very obvious reasons for thinking this is a good way to take understandings of the social (not least ecological reasons).

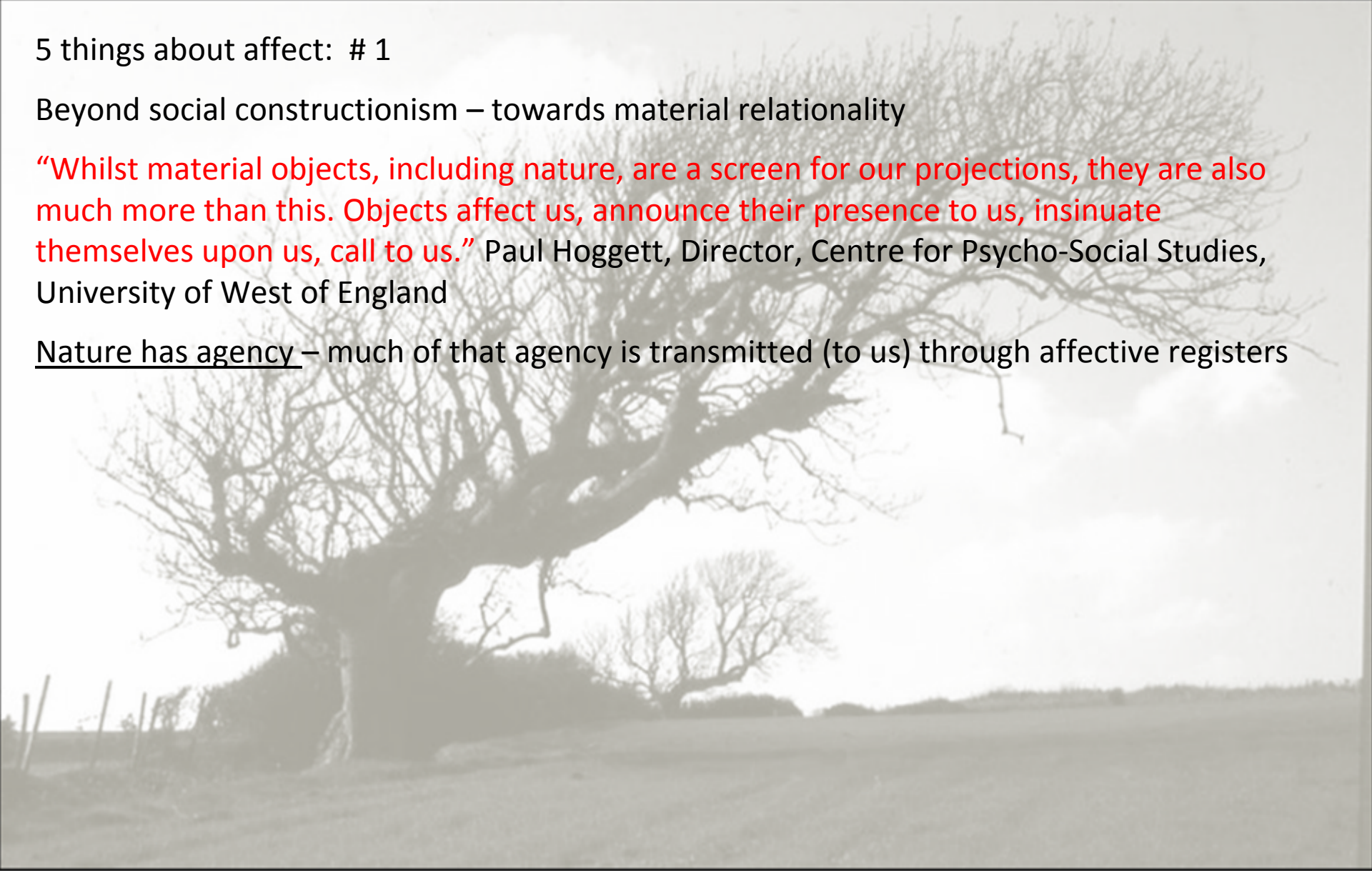
(e.g. bacteria, our dependence on 'nature' through all sorts of systems).

5 things about affect: # 1

Beyond social constructionism – towards material relationality

“Whilst material objects, including nature, are a screen for our projections, they are also much more than this. Objects affect us, announce their presence to us, insinuate themselves upon us, call to us.” Paul Hoggett, Director, Centre for Psycho-Social Studies, University of West of England

Nature has agency – much of that agency is transmitted (to us) through affective registers



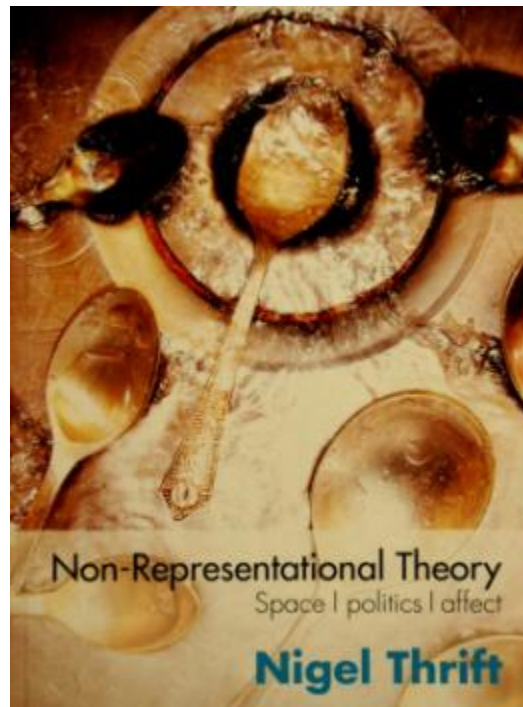
5 things about affect: # 2

The half second delay and the corporations.

The half second delay is a well established (scientific) fact. That the sub-conscious mind works in front of the conscious mind. This is where much affective business occurs.

This is not just some esoteric, arcane philosophical curiosity. It is absolutely vital in social, political and economic terms. The corporations know this. Collectively they spend billions on design and marketing so that they get you through the half-second delay - so they get at you affectively. Your body, your emotions want it – once that is set up the mind follows meekly along .

Thrift: 2008



5 things about affect: # 3

“The feeling of what happens”

The primary forces/systems in our brains /minds are emotional. These enable, enframe and exceed rational thought/language . Damasio.

“feelings of pain or pleasure or some quality in between are the bed-rock of our mind. We often fail to notice this simple reality [] But there they are, feelings of myriad emotions and related states, the continuous musical line of our minds.”

Damasio (2003: 4)

Draws upon Charles Darwin’s other great work *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 1872

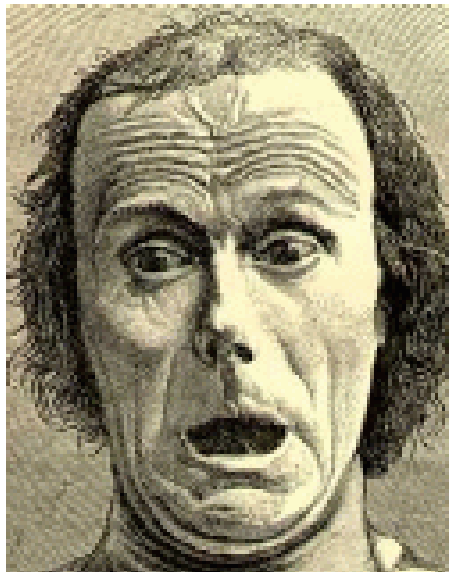


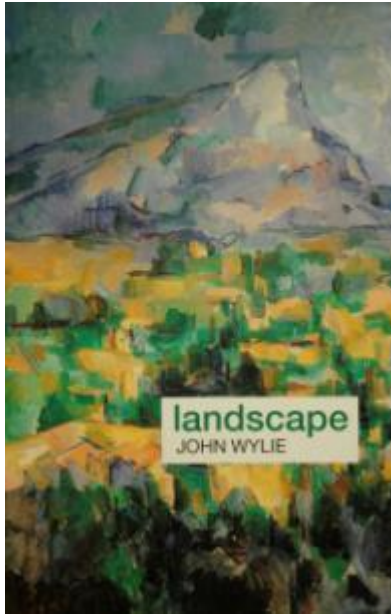
Fig. 15. Cat terrified at a dog. From life, by Mr. Wood.

5 things about affect: # 4

Art and music often operate within the affective realm.

One implication of this is that the affective turn in the social sciences has involved a growing interest in performance and arts as a way of thinking about peoples' engagement with the world, place, landscape. Art as method, arts as knowledge,

Wylie: 2007



Of course this links up with the increasing interest in using art in forest interpretation as in the new Forestry Commission Toolkit developed by **Creu-ad**

5 things about affect: # 5

Profound challenge to the social sciences which demands new relational understandings of humans and new approaches to research

Ethology

Visual ethnography

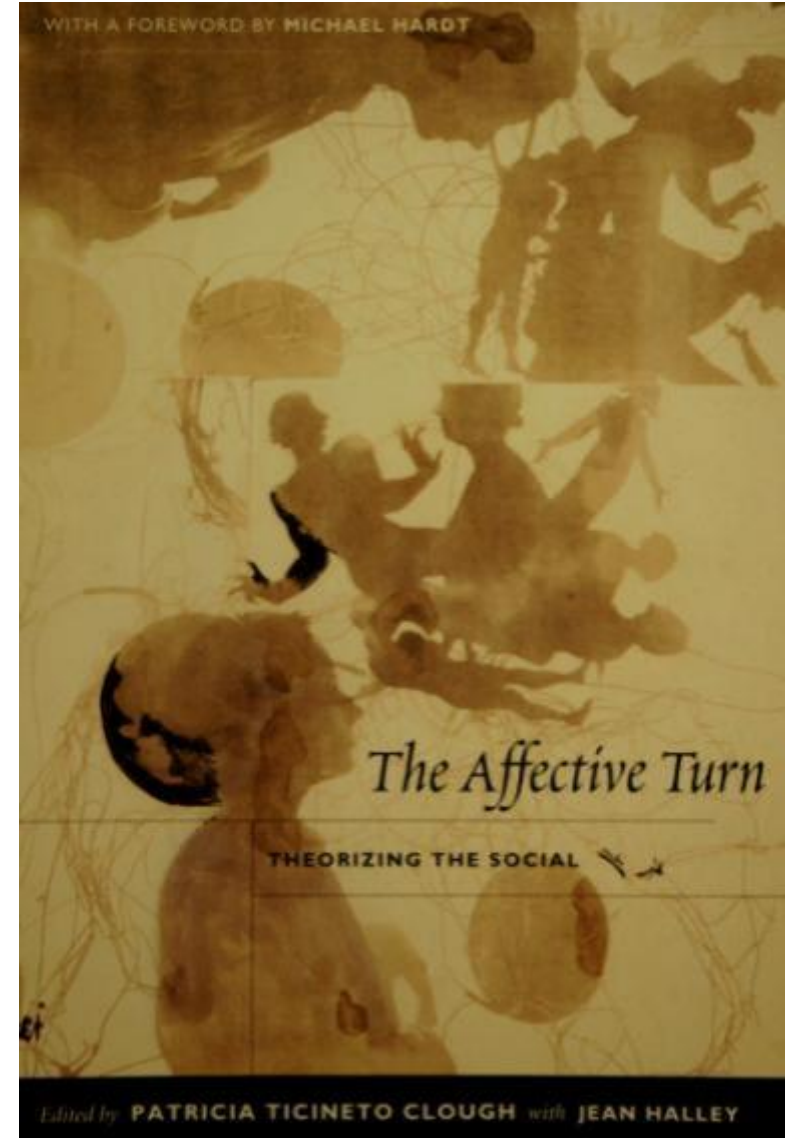
Narrative

Witnessing

Site and case specific

Micro ethnographies (deep hanging about)

Performance studies



This is how Stewart (2007) describes the affective/performative view of the social as articulated in everyday life

To attend to ordinary affects is to trace how the **potency of forces lies in their imminence to things that are both flighty and hardwired, shifty and unsteady but palpable too**. At once abstract and concrete, ordinary affects are more directly compelling than ideologies, as well as more fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings. They are not the kind of analytic object that can be laid out on the single, static plane of analysis, and they don't lend themselves to a perfect, three-tiered parallelism between analytic subject, concept, and world. They are instead, a problem or question of emergence in disparate scenes and implement strict forms and registers; a tangle of potential connections (p.4)



“The idea is to get embroiled in the site and allow ourselves to be infected by the effort, investment, and craze of the particular practice or experience being investigated. Some might call this participation, but it is a mode of participation that is more artistic and, as with most artistic practices, it comes with the side-effect of making us more vulnerable and self-reflexive. It is not however an argument for losing ourselves in the activity and deterritorializing ourselves completely from our academic remit, but nor does it mean sitting on the sidelines and judging. Rather the move, in immersing ourselves in the space, is to gather a portfolio of ethnographic ‘exposures’ that can act as lightning rods for thought. It is then in those key ‘times out’ as we set upon generating inventive ways of addressing and intervening in that which is happening, and has happened, as an academic, that such a method produces its data: a series of testimonies to practice. This is of course the flipping over of ‘participant observation’ to ‘observant participation’ that Thrift made (2000) to emphasise the serious empirical involvement involved in non-representational theory’s engagement with practices, embodiment and materiality.” (p. 326-327)

Dewsbury, J-D. (2009) Performative, Non-representational, and Affect-Based Research: Seven Injunctions. In: DeLyser, D., Atkin, S., Crang, M., Herbert, S. & McDowell, L. (eds.) Handbook of Qualitative Research in Human Geography. London: Sage. Ch. 18

Why is this particularly relevant to thinking about peoples' engagements with forests?
And wooded landscapes?

(I know forests are not simply areas of trees but – trees are important individually and collectively in this)

Forests and woodlands are very highly charged affective spaces because of

- Their spatial qualities
- Their material qualities and habits (seasons, ecologies)
- Their cultural qualities

The are engaged with / through all the affective channels – e.g.

- Bodies
- Senses
- Movement
- Memory
- Emotion
- Practice

Clues in art and literature and psychological / (eco)feminist approaches to trees/forests

Trees and the body

The sheer size of (some) trees

Their verticality

Other echoes of the human body

We returned to the bliss of Monaghan woods. There I could run for hours amidst the huge trees ... Alone in the woods, I had only to stare up into the leaves to know a sensation of leaving my body. I swept into tree form, Once or twice when autumn had turned our forests to red-gold I came home so exalted by this feeling of transformation, of having roots and waving arms and rustling leaves, that I was unable to speak (67). Anita Leslie (1981) in her memoir of growing up in Ireland.



Sensory richness

Sound, movement, colour, light

Thomas Hardy. The novel *Under the Greenwood Tree* opens thus;

To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its features. At the passing of the breeze the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amid its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall. And winter, which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves, does not destroy their individuality (1978: 39).



Passion

The sublime

Biophilia

Topophilia

Evolutionary psychology



All these channelled in large part through affect

Sublime - an overwhelming body/mind response to landscape/nature (god)

Biophilia - (E. O. Wilson) – if “hard wired” that, in effect, is affect

Topophilia - (Yi-Fu Tuan) – though affective as well as cultural processes

Materiality and be(longing)

Senses of place

Tree locate us in time and place. (Sinden, 1989 cited by Rival, 1998b: 19)

Harrison's (1991) Talking about the huge old trees in his local landscape he says, 'To stand beneath one of these maimed colossi is to be overwhelmed by its powerful, resonant presence' (135). These oak trees are 'the living tissue of time' (135) and therefore (as do other trees, to differing extents) they meet a need, which, Harrison says, he 'believe[s] to be indispensable, for parochial monuments, landmarks, milestones and other points of reference by which each person can take his or her own bearings in time and place' (139).

The oak tree in the churchyard which he describes is part of the material and cultural nexus through which 'the continuities of time and place are made visible, immediate and above all, tangible' (139).

Loss and Longing

Ahmed extended his arms, running his fingers up the smooth, hard bark, over the soft knobs on the tree's base, and along the slender, narrowing branches, until, between his hands, he felt the soft brush of leaves and, between them, a small, cool sphere: a lemon from the tree he had planted thirty-four years earlier. Zakia watch from the table in silence, tears in her eyes.

Ahmed's head was among the lower branches, and he was crying silently.

Tolan, 2007 The Lemon Tree

Some suggest that modern, commoditised, consumption based, industrial, mechanised life is impoverished in terms of affective engagement with landscape (nature). Psychogeography seeks to combat this through walking in the landscape (and other means) where the body, senses, mind, emotion can reengage with the textures of place s.

Forests and woods might offer themselves as therapeutic affective landscapes

Other space

Forests have been constructed as other to civilisation. Harrison (1992) writes that

“Western civilization literally cleared its space in the midst of forests. A sylvan fringe of darkness defined the limits of its cultivation, the margins of its cities, the boundaries of its intuitional domain; but also the extravagance of its imagination []. The governing institutions of the West – religion, law, family, city – originally established themselves in opposition to the forests” (1992, ix).

Being enclosed

Lines of sight

Other forms of space (canopy, understory)

Sam Taylor’s novel *The Republic of Trees* tells a tale of a group of older children who run away to live ‘wild’ in a forest in France.

Another beautifully crafted version of otherness in the forest Italo Calvino’s novel *The Baron in the Trees*.

Fear, Threat , loss of Self (not all good affects)

John Milton's masque, Comus, performed at Ludlow Castle (1634). The forest space as pagan , animalistic lure to the Christian self

Fairy Story Stevie Smith

I went into the woods on day
And there I walked and lost my way

When it was so dark that I could not see
A little creature came to me

He said if I would sing a song
The time would not be very long

But first I must let him hold my hand tight
Or else the wood would give me a fright

I sang a song, he let me go
But now I am home again there is nobody I know.

Conclusions

So the message really is pretty simple.

There is an extraordinary richness to peoples' engagement with places and landscapes and particularly with forests and woodlands.

Much of that richness is articulated in affective registers.

The affective turn in the social sciences is thus of particular interest to thinking about peoples' engagements with these places in theoretical , methodological and in practical management terms.

We have A CASE PhD studentship application in with ESRC based on this kind of approaches with the National Trust to investigate how we can think of visitor practice, experiences and responses to a range of differing types of site (gardens, landscape, buildings).