Abstract:
The author’s second PhD research is examining whether phenomenology can provide an effective overarching paradigm for trans-disciplinary investigation of ethnophysiography; the study of terms used for landscape features in different languages and the role of toponyms (placenames). This approach must do justice to Indigenous worldviews. The author is exploring the hypothesis that the Australian Central and Western Desert Aboriginal (Yarnangu) concepts of Jukurrpa (a holistic combination of philosophy, religion, lore and law) can be used to better understand Indigenous conceptualizations of space and place. This will assist in assessing their commensurability with forms of phenomenology, based on utilitarian, social and cultural issues. This paper briefly describes this research context, including a summary of the concepts of Jukurrpa. It also reviews phenomenological approaches to space and place, citing authors such as Casey, Ingold, Malpas and Patočka. The paper then considers particular aspects of space and place in the context of Jukurrpa, including the following: the way study of a particular language reveals subtleties of conceptions of space and place as an expression of the ‘lifeworld’ of that community of speakers; the use of generic landscape terms, compared with toponyms, to describe and represent space and place; how embodiment, movement and affordance produce ontologies of space and place; the role of ‘communalized intentionality’ in transformation of space to place, especially sacred places; and linear places (interconnecting pathways), particularly as expressed in Jukurrpa dreaming tracks (songlines). The paper concludes with discussion of how such concepts can apply to English countryside as well as Australian desert landscapes, indicating universal aspects of dwelling with landscape.

Keywords:
space; place; landscape; language; toponyms; ethnophysiography; phenomenology; Australian; Aboriginal; Jukurrpa

1. Ethnophysiography

Ethnophysiography investigates cultural differences in conceptualizations of landscape, via comparisons between the meanings of terms that people from different cultures use to refer to landscape and its components (Mark and Turk, 2003). Landscape is an interesting topic because relationships with land are central to many cultures and landscape features pose problems for classification, since there is no set way of dividing the continuous landscape into parts. Ethnophysiography also includes study of toponyms (placenames), and their relationship to generic landscape terms, and the knowledge systems, beliefs and customs of peoples concerning landscapes.

The author has been involved in ethnophysiography case studies with Yindjibarndi (Australia) and Navajo (USA) languages (Mark, Turk, and Stea, 2007; 2010; Turk, Mark and Stea, 2011), using methods described in Turk, Mark, O'Meara, and Stea (2012). Linguists published accounts of nine other case studies (Burenhult, 2008) and an international conference with 26 participants was held in 2008 and a book of proceedings published (Mark, Turk, Burenhult and Stea, 2011). Collaborations are continuing via LACOLA, an EU funded project investigating cross-culturally how human languages categorise and represent the landscape. The author has commenced a study (with LACOLA linguist Clair Hill) of landscape terms and cultural connections in Manyjilyjarra, a traditional Martu language of Australia’s Western Desert.
2. Use of Phenomenology in Ethnophysiography Research

2.1 Phenomenology as an Over-arching Paradigm

A *prima facie* case was established in Turk (2007; 2011) for use of phenomenology as an over-arching paradigm for trans-disciplinary research (Booth, Rodgers and AgInsight, 2000) in ethnophysiography; or, inverting the spatial metaphor, phenomenology can ‘stand under’ the disciplines, providing a foundation and scaffolding (Fuchs, 1976, p. 27). This paper also seeks to demonstrate the potential for the reverse relationship; i.e. that ethnophysiography research might assist in explicating aspects of place in phenomenology.

Phenomenology seeks to understand how people interact with things, including landscape features, as part of ‘being in the world’ (Heidegger, 1962). Mohanty (1997) provides an analysis of phenomenology in terms of a trajectory of concerns. Each of these concerns has direct relevance to ethnophysiography, however, the key aspects considered in this paper are: perception and embodiment; intentionality; and essences.

As phenomenology has developed, it has more adequately addressed the meaning of the world for groups, not just individuals. The common conceptualizations of a speech community extend beyond the merely physical aspects of topographic features to encompass their cultural and spiritual dimensions: ‘the world as a whole appears to us in the light of beliefs, opinions, conceptions, certainties, etc., that prevail in the community to which we belong’ (Gurwitsch, 1957, p. 372).

Malpas (2006) contends that an understanding of the relationship of individuals and communities to the places where they dwell is central to phenomenology. Basso (1996, p. 54) suggests that: ‘the concept of dwelling assigns importance to the forms of consciousness with which individuals perceive and apprehend geographical space’.

2.2 Perception and Embodiment

Key aspects of phenomenology are the concepts of ‘perception’ and ‘embodiment’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). Carman and Hansen (2005, p. 12) explain that perception is an important component of people’s relationship with landscape, including terms used for landscape features:

Perception … is neither brute sensation nor rational thought, but an aspect of the body’s intentional grip on its physical and social environment. … our understanding of the contents of our own thoughts and experiences is as linguistically constructed, hence theory-laden, as our understanding of the composition and behaviour of physical objects.

Every-day movements through and between places, as part of practical and social activities of a person’s lifeworld, provide an embodied intentional relationship with landscape:

We perform our movements in a space which is not “empty” or unrelated to them, but which on the contrary, bears a highly determinate relation to them: movement and background are, in fact, only artificially separated stages of a unique totality (Goldstein, 1923 p. 163, cited in Merleau-Ponty 1945/1962 p. 159).

In the context of ethnophysiography, embodied relationships with landscape can be discussed via the concept of affordance.

2.3 Affordance

Gibson (1977, p. 68) provides this definition: ‘The affordances of the environment are what it offers animals, what it provides or furnishes, for good or ill’. He fore-gounds examples from the landscape domain. A paper in preparation by David Mark and the author examines the role that affordance can play in understanding embodied relationships with landscape. The set of landscape terms identified in the Yindjibarndi language (Turk and Mark, 2008) has been
arranged in affordance-based categories. This could perhaps form the basis of an etic grid, against which emic data from particular ethnophysiography case studies could be compared.

Ethnophysiography studies indicate that affordance by itself under-determines categorization of landscape features. Affordance works well for classifying landscape features that have direct, perhaps pre-cognitive, relationships with human activities; e.g. cliffs afford falling and smooth flat areas afford lying down. However, more complex utilitarian relationships with landscape, like driving animals into a box canyon or planting seeds in fertile soil, involve higher-level cognitive functions and social organization. It seems likely that embodiment involves affordances, but landscape categorization relates also to intentionality.

2.4 Intentionality
Smith (2007, p. 2) asserts that the study of consciousness via phenomenology can explain how it is directed towards things in the world. Moran (1996, p. 1) notes that the concept of intentionality was reintroduced into European philosophy by Franz Brentano and offers the following definition: ‘Intentionality, 'directedness' or 'aboutness', refers to the manner mental states purportedly relate beyond themselves; take objects which may or not exist; carry semantic content’. Brentano’s student Edmund Husserl made intentionality a cornerstone of phenomenology and linked it to inter-subjectivity. Later phenomenologists extended it to communal aspects of lifeworlds.

Malpas (1999, p. 187) explains how a person's worldview applies to landscape:

> Embedded in the physical landscape is a landscape of personal and cultural history, of social ordering and symbolism … the narratives of the land as enculturated and humanised cannot be prised away from its physical structure.

He also discusses people's relationship to objects in terms of intentions and actions:

> Understanding an agent, understanding oneself, as engaged in some activity is a matter both of understanding the agent as standing in certain causal and spatial relations to objects and of grasping the agent as having certain attitudes - notably certain relevant beliefs and desires - about the objects concerned (p. 95).

Dwelling in place is a central theme of Indigenous worldviews. Exploring key aspects of those worldviews, via ethnophysiography, could lead to a deeper understanding of intentionality. The author’s research is using a phenomenological approach to understand connections to landscape of Yarnangu (Aboriginal Australians from the Central and Western Deserts). This can explicate the concept of ‘communalized intentionality’ (Kockelmans, 1994).

2.5 Essences
Van Manen (1990, p. 10) contends that: ‘The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances of particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon’. Ethnophysiography research can help explicate issues of universalism central to debates within phenomenology.

Understanding of the differences in the ways languages treat landscape is still emerging. However, based on existing case studies, the author developed the Ethnophysiography Descriptive Model (Turk, Mark and Stea, 2011). Its purpose is to list key differences in the way landscape is treated in different languages (semantics of terms) and the possible factors which might lead to these differences, although not implying deterministic causation. This assists investigation of possible universal factors regarding ways landscape is represented in languages, potentially leading to identification of landscape ‘essences’.
3. Doing Justice to Indigenous Worldviews

Ethnophysiography must adopt a perspective that is not unduly biased towards Western (European) concepts of knowledge. Where key case studies are carried out with Indigenous peoples, their worldviews should be reflected in explanations and theories that result.

Mohanty (1997, p. 60 - emphasis in original) contends that dwelling is not just about practical aspects, hence consideration of Indigenous culture is essential:

The lifeworld is a world of practice (of action, making and doing) and praxis (of social action, of production of goods, and distribution of goods). It would, however, be mistaken to say that these modes of acting exhaust the lifeworld in all its dimensions. For example, there are religious, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions. By virtue of these, the world as well as things in the world are presented to subjects inhabiting that world with different sorts of values - as useful, as sacred, as beautiful - all of which can be brought under the general heading "cultural".

Early phenomenologists often adopted a Euro-centric view, dismissing Indigenous cultures as primitive and totemic, without examining how Indigenous knowledges may inform phenomenology. There is only space here to briefly point to the work of Dermot Moran and his colleagues in reviewing the influence on Edmund Husserl of arm-chair proto-anthropologist Lucian Levy-Bruhl; for instance:

Husserl believes there is an essential teleology to Western cultural development; it is committed to the universalization of reason and furthermore others cultures will embrace Europeanization, and never vice-versa: the European will never feel an urge to "Indianize" (Crisis, 275/Hua. VI320, cited in Moran, 2011, p. 466).

However, Husserl in other places shows some appreciation of non-European knowledge systems, although he asserts that non-European thinking is ‘mythical-magical’, while European thinking is ‘rational’. Each way of thinking is a system: ‘in which everything can be explained perfectly; Every people has its “logic” and, accordingly, if this logic is explicated in propositions, “its” a priori’ (Crisis, 373/Hua. VI.382, cited in Moran, 2011, p. 467/8). This seems to suggest that what is required of a non-European knowledge system to be considered valid is that its logic is explicated in propositions. Is this a reasonable constraint? Is western rationality adequate for comparison of alternative worldviews?

4. Yarnangu Concepts of Jukurrpa

For Indigenous Australians, the term 'country' has a localized meaning; i.e. the area of land traditionally occupied by a particular language group (Benterrak, Muecke and Roe, 1984; Sutton, 1995). Thus ‘country’ comes with a complex set of shared rights and obligations, expressed through Jukurrpa.

Myers (1986, p. 48) discusses the role of Jukurrpa (Tjukurrtnju in their language), 'The Dreaming', for the Pintupi, a Yarnangu Aboriginal group: ‘Both the country (the landscape and its form) and the people are thought to be "from The Dreaming" (tjukurrtnju), the ground of being’. The Dreaming is for all time: ‘It represents all that exists as deriving from a single, unchanging, timeless source’ (p. 52). The Dreaming determines concepts of place and cultural associations with particular landscape features; hills, creeks, salt lakes, etc..

Jukurrpa can be regarded as Yarnangu religion, philosophy, lore and law (Black, 2011; Cane, 2002; Stanner, 2010). Whereas these topics tend to be differentiated in Western intellectual traditions, Jukurrpa integrates all of these matters as the holistic basis of the Yarnangu lifeworld. There is not space in this paper to detail the social structures (e.g. the ‘section system’) specified by Jukurrpa, however, these are also central to the Yarnangu lifeworld, and mirror the rights and responsibilities duality inherent in relationships with land (Cane, 2002).
It is probably not appropriate to try to separate out a ‘Yarnangu philosophy’ from Jukurrpa. However, this does not prevent useful examination of the commensurability between Jukurrpa and forms of phenomenology. For instance, Jukurrpa is essentially about Being in the world, the central theme of phenomenology. The author is pursuing this investigation of commensurability via his second PhD research on Yarnangu relationships with ‘country’, especially places of spiritual significance. Academic understanding of these matters is (necessarily) limited, so it is important to seek an improved understanding in a manner commensurate with an appropriate respect for Yarnangu secret and sacred knowledges.

5. Phenomenology of Space and Place via Ethnophysiography

Ethnophysiography studies can explicate phenomenological issues of space and place, especially through investigation of the intimate relationships that Indigenous peoples have developed with landscape; in some instances over many tens of thousands of years. Basso (1996, p. 84) suggest that detailed ethnography is essential to understanding particular notions of place: ‘Everything, or almost everything, hinges on the particulars, and because it does, ethnography is essential’.

The question may arise as to whether phenomenology and ethnophysiography are sufficiently commensurate to permit this type of synergy; given that ethnophysiography is principally an empirical discipline and phenomenology is not. Phenomenology concerns structures that are a priori of any lived experience, rather than a set of principles deduced from examining examples of lifeworlds (Heidegger, 1962; Patočka, 1998).

However, phenomenology needs to be made tractable to facilitate its use outside of philosophy. Seeking explanations of ethnophysiography data through phenomenology, and using ethnophysiography data to help explain phenomenological concepts, both seem to the author to advance this objective.

6. Practical Aspects of Place and Lifeworlds

The association of people with place concerns practical land use related attributes of landscape that fit with requirements of their daily needs. Ingold (1993, p. 152) discusses landscape in terms of a ‘dwelling perspective’. To explain how dwelling involves temporal patterns of regular activities, he introduces the notion of ‘taskscape’: ‘to denote a pattern of dwelling activities, and the intrinsic temporality of the taskscape is shown to lie in its rhythmic interrelations or patterns of resonance’.

In traditional Yarnangu hunter-gatherer societies such activities were vital at a utilitarian level for survival. Hence, their language about landscape reflects these patterns of behaviour.

7. Attachment to Place

Explorations of ‘sense of place’ span many disciplines and traditions. Tuan (1974) discussed environmental perception, attitudes and values about place and coined the term ‘Topophilia’: ‘the affective bond between people and place or setting’ (p. 4).

We can consider Yarnangu relationships with ngurra (country) via the recent turn to ‘affect’ in literature and social sciences (Leys, 2011; Massumi, 2002). For instance, to understand what is happening for Yarnangu when they approach a sacred site we need to deal as much with feelings as with thoughts.

8. Gathering of Places and Jukurrpa

Casey (1996, p. 24, 25) discusses how places gather together physical and abstract aspects, such as ‘experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts’, reflecting details of local landscape: ‘Being in a place is being in a configurative complex of things’. Swain (1993, p. 33) contends that each Jukurrpa dreaming track (indicating the journey of ancestral beings) is a complex linear place, linked ‘by common intentionality’, rather than a sequences of places. Hence, gathering can also be explicated by consideration of the interconnectedness of Yarnangu cultural associations with topography, represented in narrative, song and dance.
Ethnophysiography studies of assemblages of landscape elements can contribute to our understanding of social and linguistic aspects of place. This relates to generic landscape terms and also place names, which sometimes refer to groups of features (Hercus, Hodges and Simpson, 2002; Sutton, 1995). In addition, Indigenous peoples often use placenames, rather than generic landscape terms, to refer to landscape features.

9. Universal Aspects of Dwelling with Landscape

The indigenous senses of place discussed in this paper are impressive. However, it is important to note that places are important to people of all cultures, including those who have not lived for extensive periods in a particular location. By calling such feelings ‘universal’ it is meant that they potentially apply everywhere, not that they are necessarily present in all people or that they are manifest in the same sorts of ways.

V.S. Naipaul in The Enigma of Arrival (1987: 24) describes his feelings about the English countryside on the Salisbury Plain near Stonehenge in the United Kingdom. Naipaul describes his strong attachment to this landscape (despite being born elsewhere) built up gradually as he dwelt there. Despite this little piece of England being unlike the untamed expanses that we sometimes consider the domain of fundamental relationships with land, many of the same types of place associations apply as for the Yarnangu peoples discussed earlier.

10. Conclusions

This paper has only been able to deal superficially with the potential interactions between place, culture, phenomenology and ethnophysiography. It provides an initial consideration of aspects of perception and embodiment, intentionality and essences.

For Indigenous Australians such as Yarnangu, land and culture are integrated with concepts of time via Jukurrpa. Examination of Indigenous concepts of place in Australia, and elsewhere, can provide a rich vein of phenomenological understanding; for instance regarding ‘communalized intentionality’ and ‘affect’.

There are universal aspects of dwelling with landscape. However, there are key differences in the ways that particular languages discuss landscape. Analysis of ethnophysiography case studies can assist to develop enhanced understanding of universal essences of landscape as place.

References


