Ireland

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Introduction[1]

The site of some of western Europe's most dramatic movement episodes, Ireland is a peculiar case for studying social movement research. The 1798 uprising was a significant element of the Atlantic Revolutions; the Land War (1879 - 1882) initiated one of the world's most successful land reforms, with a near-complete transition from landlord-tenant relationships to peasant proprietorship; the period between 1916 and 1923 saw one of western Europe's few successful independence movements; the Northern Irish "troubles" from 1969 – 1994 were Europe's longest-running episode of lethal internal violence; 1978 - 1981 saw one of the few outright defeats of nuclear power worldwide; the women's and GLBTQ movements brought about a more dramatic change from institutionalised Catholic power than in most Northern contexts; and working-class community organising has played a role in Ireland comparable to Latin American contexts. On the face of it, a strong social movements research agenda would seem natural.

However, most of these topics have been successfully colonised by other disciplines. In the independent state, history has emphasised questions of national legitimacy and the view from elites, often at the expense of researching popular organising. Feminist and GLBTQ scholarship has similarly prioritised a celebratory or critical account of the women's movement in which *movement* aspects are routinely

secondary. Where Irish history is less unique, such as agrarian unrest, labour history and the left, strong tendencies to atheoretical empiricism have restricted wider dialogues.

As might be expected in a small post-colonial setting, movement-based theorising and historiography have also made significant contributions, but as with academic work the key concerns have typically been to legitimate movements and explore their relationship to the state, particularly because movement intellectuals have often become (or started as) academics and state functionaries. The result, as in India, is a field dominated by discussions of the choices made by actors (often narrowed to leading figures or political parties) at well-known historical junctures, and their role in inflecting processes of state formation and restructuring. In parallel, Irish movements have also been a privileged ground for *literature* and debates over national identity.

Partly as a result, research on movements has often sought refuge in North American and British canonical orthodoxy and has minimised engagement with these literatures' movement-relevant aspects. A primary concern has been to convince others of the value of social movement studies for interpreting Ireland, rather than asking how the Irish experience might inform the development of social movement studies. Given the very particular course of Irish history, this is a missed opportunity.

Institutional forms

Tovey and Share (2003: 23 - 41) note that Irish sociology moved from a largely uncritical, positivist approach to playful exploration for its own sake, with genuinely critical work marginalised. This comment highlights the links between intellectuals

and power characteristic of postcolonial settings. History and literature have moved from celebrating nationalism to hostility to popular action (or denying its existence other than as violence); political science, meanwhile, ignores anything independent of official politics. The prolific "civil society" literature (with exceptions such as O'Donovan 2011) uncritically reproduces official perspectives and reduces popular activity to invited participation in officially-created spaces. The state in its changing forms – from Protestant statelet to ethnic power balance in the north and from developmental nationalism to loyal Europeans in the south – is the elephant in the room of research on popular agency in Ireland, and it is unsurprising that in fields like history much of the best work on movements is done abroad.

In Ireland, leaders and intellectuals from popular organisations regularly become part of the political, media and literary establishment, whether due to movement success or state co-optation. There is a large public interest in some aspects of movement-state encounters, and it is not unusual for researchers to have close relationships with movement organisations. All this affects research on movements, as does research *outside* universities: some of the best-known writers in the field are journalists, independent historians, movement intellectuals, precarious academics, community activists, librarians, authors and the like. This is a healthy check on the state-centric role of credentialised researchers, although not immune to its own pressures.

Scale has other effects: fewer than a dozen academics on the island have social movement research as the leading element of their academic profile[2]. Thus most writing on social movements is situated within a broader, usually sociological,

[2] In writing this piece I am conscious of being perhaps the only permanent academic on the island with the bulk of their *teaching* and doctoral supervision explicitly in this area.

perspective. Hence, too, few researchers can have the luxury of focussing on a single movement or organisation; good researchers also need to be aware of academic literatures which frame their topic differently; and many researchers are in dialogue both with movements and a wider public. All this enables a wider perspective than is possible in more specialised contexts – when researchers take advantage of it.

Overview of the literature

Given the history and power of Irish social movements, much research in the area is largely descriptive, unconsciously assuming particular frameworks of analysis. Nevertheless there are often attempts to break out of this and engage with one or another form of explicit analysis of collective action. One such area is that of pre-independence nationalism, Northern Ireland (Smyth 2006; O'Keefe 2013), and postcolonial studies (O'Connor and Foley 2006; Cox 2013a). A second is in that of pre-independence peasant struggles (Donnelly 2009, Cronin 2012), labour and working-class history (Fagan 2000; O'Connor 2011; the journal *Saothar* is an important resource in this area) and the history of working-class politics in Ireland (Newsinger 2004, Ó Drisceoil and Lane 2005). Here the developing use of oral history, and the newly-formed Centre for the Histories of Labour and Class in Galway, may play significant roles in the future. A third is in the area of feminism (Mahon 1995, Galligan 1998, Connolly 2002), gay rights (Ryan 2006) and equality more broadly (Baker et al. 2009). Nonetheless in all of these fields the wider discipline marginalises movement analysis.

US / canonical approaches

While one strand of Irish movement research has been keen to adopt international (read: US) approaches, this has been predominantly for local purposes, a fact underlined by the low levels of participation by Irish researchers in social movement events or publishing abroad. In 36 *issues* of the UK-based journal *Social Movement Studies*, for example, I identified a sum total of three Irish-related *articles*: one by an Irish-based author studying movements abroad, one by American academics using Northern Ireland as a comparator and one by an Irish-based author looking at movements in Northern Ireland. Typically, "canonical" social movement research in Ireland is a resource for local academic strategies: until recently Irish researchers have not been under the same pressure as their British counterparts to publish in the "right" journals, and very few have had any regular commitment to social movement research networks of any kind.

There are a handful of honourable exceptions, notably Hilary Tovey (below) and Pauline Cullen, whose work (e.g. 2010) has focussed particularly on NGOs, coalitions and the international arena. Writers abroad whose work has been primarily oriented towards Ireland should also be mentioned, notably Louise Ryan (e.g. Ryan and Ward 2007) on first-wave feminism and nationalism, and Lorenzo Bosi (e.g. Bosi and Alimi 2008), who has set Northern Irish political violence in its historical context.

Nonetheless there have been some attempts at defining the field in orthodox terms. In 1998 the social movements section of the ISA held its conference in Cork; a related volume was published eight years later (Connolly and Hourigan 2006). This offered a relatively conventional theoretical overview followed by a series of movement-

specific chapters along similar lines (e.g. Mullally 2006) and excluding working-class struggles (labour, community activism). More recently, a special issue of the *Irish Journal of Sociology* (vol. 18 no. 2, 2010) took a rather more eclectic approach to social movements and civil society.

Macro-approaches

The best macro-theoretical approach, however, is Michel Peillon's (1982) *Contemporary Irish Society*. This uses Alain Touraine's model from *The voice and the eye* (1981) to analyse the class projects of different groups within Irish society, within the framework of an understanding of collective action as struggling over "historicity", how society makes and remakes itself. Peillon shows convincingly how "the project of the bourgeoisie, backed up by economic growth, has become the major aim of Irish society as a whole, backed up not only by the State but also by the farmers and the trade unions" (1982: 59). If this discussion of national-developmentalist hegemony calls out for an updating for neoliberal times, it remains the most substantial attempt to think through the relationship of social movements to Irish society, and deserves wider international attention as a model.

Three other macro-theoretical contributions can be noted here. Carol Coulter (1993) does for feminism what the best writers do for Irish environmentalism, distinguishing an official "civil society" – drawing on international models and seeking inclusion within elites – from the "incivil society" (Sen 2005) of working-class women's organising, often framed within a nationalist approach (and hence subordinate to ethno-religious boundaries). Tomás Jones (2003) attempts a rethinking of canonical social movement accounts of the Irish experience, as does my

own "Gramsci in Mayo" (Cox 2011), part of a broader project to develop a Marxist theory of movements starting from an Irish perspective (Cox 2006; Barker et al. 2013). Much remains to be done in understanding the role of movements in a society so visibly shaped by them.

Rural populism

The long history of Irish environmentalism raises many questions. One of the most robust findings is to undermine the image of such movements as predominantly urban and middle-class. Rural sociologist Hilary Tovey (1993) neatly distinguished between one aspect of Irish environmentalism which has had this character (and by now largely exists only in the form of NGOs) and attempts by rural communities, often disadvantaged, to struggle for forms of development in line with their own needs and interests rather than those of multinational corporations. This argument has been developed by Allen and Jones (1990, updated as Allen 2004) and by Liam Leonard (2007) who has used the term rural populism to describe this form of resistance. If the "two environmentalisms" argument in some ways parallels US literature on environmental justice, in other respects the struggle for a different development has more of a post-colonial flavour.

Ireland has a particularly significant record here – one of the only states to defeat nuclear power entirely after a complex struggle (Dalby 1984), it saw battles over chemical plants in the southern province of Munster through the 1970s and 1980s, followed by local conflicts around incinerators, waste dumps and mobile phone masts. The struggles around the Shell / Statoil gas pipeline planned for Rossport, Co.

Mayo (e.g. Garavan 2008, Slevin 2013) and the extension of fracking exploration across the western midlands have kept this issue alive.

One theme not fully addressed in this literature is how community-based rural environmentalism relates to newer forms of counter-cultural and direct action ecology which draw from other European countries. Present in the Carnsore conflict, these approaches returned to public prominence with roads conflicts at Glen of the Downs (c. 1997 - 2000) and the archaeological site of Tara (c. 2003 - 10). Initial fears of internal struggles over "movement imperialism" remained at the level of polemic attacks, while in Rossport, where state forces have alienated the local community, campaigners have shown their dedication to the conflict and a willingness to engage closely with community issues, leading to a much stronger alliance.

An unexpected dimension to Irish environmental research has been the particular attention given to organic farming, community gardening, farmers' markets and so on – the product in the long term of a generation of organic farmers (Tovey 1999) and attempts by the state to deploy the framework for conventionally-oriented farmers: the agricultural research body Teagasc has been a reliable source of PhD scholarships. Some very interesting work has been done by e.g. Oliver Moore (2006) and Annette Jørgensen (2006). An attention to questions of knowledge and meaning-making has naturally bulked large here.

Tovey's recent (2007) *Environmentalism in Ireland*, finally, updates the picture and takes a much closer look at the individual and biographical level of environmental activism in Ireland, showing the extent of diversity and also to some extent the breakdown of some of these distinctions, facilitated by a greater informality in

practical organisation. She suggests that analysing Irish movements in terms similar to those used for southern Europe by researchers like Maria Kousis.

Community development

Working-class community organising in Ireland, particularly the Republic, provides some particular challenges to research. Levels of participation since the 1960s have been extraordinarily high (Mullan and Cox 2000), bearing comparison more with ethnic minorities in the US (Naples 1998) than with any European realities. Similar levels also appear in Northern Ireland, albeit subsumed under the framework of contending ethnic parties and paramilitary organisations (both of which were also present in the Republic but lost their grip on community organising earlier).

However, as Geoghegan (2000) shows, characteristic of this movement in the past two decades has been a strategy of advancing class-based agendas *within* the language frameworks of top-down "community development" (itself in turn arguably an attempt to co-opt the developing movement). This has undermined both activists' willingness to talk openly about their political strategies (with notably exceptions such as Lyder 2006 and Bissett 2009) and academics' ability to see community development as *movement* (Powell and Geoghegan 2004).

Nonetheless, a range of engaged researchers have carried out significant research on Irish community activism. The most impressive is Margaret Gillan (2010), whose work explores the contested politics of technical knowledge in the production of community-based movement media within state-structured frameworks and adopts a participatory action research approach. Jean Bridgeman (2010) has similarly attempted to articulate the politics of working-class self-education. My own *Eppur si*

muove (Cox 2013b) attempts a Marxist analysis of the history. Finally, Michael Punch (2009) has situated community activism within a specifically urban perspective.

For more externally-located observers, we should mention Curtin and Varley's (1995) typology of community action, Niamh Hourigan's (2001) work on Irish-language organising, Mark Boyle's (2005) attempt to use Sartre's dialectic to study the history of working-class community action in the Dublin suburb of Ballymun, and Alessandro Zagato's recent (2012) PhD thesis, which takes an autonomist line.

Engaged scholarship

Along with the relative weakness of purely academic research on social movements has come a long history of engaged scholarship, shaped by movements' internal theoretical traditions and the political involvement of some academics. Such analyses were typically influenced by debates abroad. This is the case, for example, for the *Ripening of Time* journal (1976 – 1982) associated with the Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Struggle group; *Times Change* (1994 – 2000) linked to the Democratic Left party; John Goodwillie's *Colours in the Rainbow* (1988) and the journal *An Caorthann* (1994 – 98), both associated with the Green Party; or the extensive theoretical output linked to the anarchist Workers Solidarity Movement (1984 – present). The Irish Left Online Document Archive http://cedarlounge.wordpress.com/archive-index/ and the Struggle archive http://struggle.ws/wsm/ are both useful sources for such material.

The 2007 symposium "Everyday creativity, counter cultures and social change" and the 2011 conference "New agendas in social movements studies", by contrast, both

represent research produced within the university but by engaged scholars, often starting from an activist background, and in dialogue with movements. My own work has largely taken place within this framework and has involved systematic collaboration with activist writers, particularly in community development (above) and the movement of movements (Curry and Cox 2010), with particular attention to methodology and the politics of knowledge (Barker and Cox 2002). Much of the work discussed above in terms of environmentalism and community activism adopts similar strategies, as does much writing on the alter-globalisation movement (e.g. Finnegan 2005, Browne 2004, Meade 2008) and the "Maynooth school" (below).

Maynooth school

This is largely shaped by the encounter between contemporary engaged social movements scholarship from the non-institutional left, and the impressive body of largely unwritten practice and theory developed within working-class Irish community activism. One meeting point for the two has been in radical forms of participatory action research as a methodological and political principle, and social movement practice as the field where such research can have most effect (in other words on participants' self-understanding, strategic action and reflection).

Early moments of this engagement were shaped by collaborations between Laurence Cox and (respectively) youth worker Martin Geoghegan, Caitriona Mullan of Third System Approaches, Pat McBride and the Ballymun Oral History Project, care worker Shane Dunphy, and Margaret Gillan of Community Media Network. This developed into a postgraduate programme with activists carrying out participatory action research into movement practice at the National University of Ireland Maynooth,

including the work of Chris Bermingham (2011) on birth activism; Jean Bridgeman on working-class cultures of resistance, Hilary Darcy on protest policing (ní Dhorchaigh and Cox 2011), Catherine Friedrich on movement knowledge, Asia Rutkowska (2007) on social centres, Anna Szolucha (2013) on activist decision-making.

This experience in turn made Maynooth a key node for the development of the academic / activist journal of social movement research *Interface*, with its openness to a diversity of formats and sources of knowledge, its insistence on the importance of locally-grounded understanding and its concern to develop dialogue across disciplinary boundaries and political traditions. Along with this came a push to rethink Marxism and feminism in particular as theories "from and for" movements and to clarify the elements of a theory of movements present within each (Barker et al. 2013, Eschle et al. 2011).

A final (for now) stage has been the joint project between the Depts of Sociology and Adult and Community Education of an MA course in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism which offers movement activists a year to reflect on their own experience, "learn from each other's struggles" and build alliances, and develop their own movement's practice. This is perhaps the logical outcome of a trajectory focussing on the relationship between movement knowledge and academic research: an intensive engagement which is as yet mostly manifested in practice and activist debates rather than in journal articles or monographs. A developing archive of research on social movements in Ireland should disseminate this knowledge more widely.

An agenda for the future?

Social movements in Ireland present a range of challenges not only to Irish researchers, but also to the wider field. Irish movement history is in important ways different from most west European states. More use could be made of it as a counter-example or test case to avoid building local assumptions (for example, those relating to core west European states) into theorising. Such dialogues have a long history with majority world countries, going back to C19th Irish-Asian anti-nationalist connections and later solidarity movements with Latin America. The challenges faced in developing adequate theory for such comparisons highlight the rich potential of attempts to develop approaches which can work in the Irish context beyond the theoretically trivial level (eg "applying" a particular form of organisational conceptualisation to an Irish example).

In *Understanding European movements*, Cristina Flesher Fominaya and I (2013) proposed the concept of national or regional "movement landscapes" to respond to this. The metaphor is intended to highlight four key features of movement realities:

(1) Landscapes have real, materially powerful features (movements are actors) but at the same time these cannot be understood in isolation from one another (movements are not units or atoms to be studied individually).

(2) Landscapes are shaped both by underlying structure (geology) and more surface features (vegetation, human activity etc.). Movements similarly operate in a layered reality similar to Bhaskar's critical realism: even when they are successful in affecting social structure its realities are structured differently to those of state power or public discourse. In this sense, Weber's "class-status-party" distinctions or Lipset and Rokkan's cleavage theory are useful as highlighting different levels (social structure, group identity

formation and internal institution-building, political parties and other forms of conflictual public representation).

(3) Landscapes are constructed historically, in processes which are still ongoing and involve the gradual (sedimentation, erosion, uplift etc.) and the cataclysmic (glaciation, vulcanism, submergence etc.) Similarly, movement actors operate both in moderately straightforward contexts of slow changes and in contexts shaped by past struggles, particularly the outcome of past waves of intense mobilisation or revolutionary conflict.

(4) Landscapes are boundaried in various ways which cannot be easily thought away: plains versus hill country, major rivers and sea boundaries, forested and open areas etc. can all be traversed but such crossings require effort and different approaches. The boundaries between nationalist and unionist in Ireland, Christian and secular organising, social democratic and Stalinist, institutional and non-institutional left etc. remain fundamental structuring features even where alliances are constructed across these boundaries.

As yet this remains at the level of metaphor; but a serious comparison of European movement landscapes would be a major contribution from social movement studies. It is something which Irish activists have to consider when relating to "Europe" – in ways similar to those faced by British, Scandinavian, or southern European activists. This shared experience of difference highlights the need for a deeper and more structural conception of historical-comparative work in movement analysis at the level of national and regional movement landscapes; something which at present is often relegated to a descriptive introduction or anecdotal commentary.

A related question is how far local actors appropriate international movement identities and discourses and seek mutual recognition by international organisations.

This process goes back at least as far as the French revolution and the links formed by radical democrats between states; the Irish, Polish and Italian nationalisms of the mid-nineteenth century and the crystallising out of Marxist and anarchist identities slightly later had very long-term effects. The process continues through the struggles for recognition of different forces within the European Resistance, the movements of 1968, the construction of international feminist, environmental, peace etc. networks in the 1980s; the processes leading to the European Federation of Green Parties and comparable, smaller processes on the far left; the construction of the European "movement of movements" and now anti-austerity organising. Naive comparative approaches can treat the presence of a national node as an unproblematic fact, rather than asking (as e.g. research on Green Parties has done) what local movement realities are represented by the choice to use a particular name and what the local impact of international affiliation is.

A particular feature of the Irish landscape is what I have described as "movement-become-state" or (subsequently) "movements from above". The formation of the Irish state in the south was the result of a dramatic restructuring of hegemonic relations around a number of movements (peasants' become farmers', nationalist, Catholic, elements of the workers' and women's movements, cultural-nationalist etc.) which then underwent significant processes of transformation as elements of each became loyal or dissident parts of the new power structure, while others were excluded or in some cases violently repressed in what has been called an Irish counter-revolution (Regan 1999).

The new state nonetheless relied on continuing processes of popular mobilisation, increasingly now "from above" (ie with the active support of state and capitalist power), for a range of institutionalised "inside movements" (mainstream

nationalism, Catholic organisations, conservative trade unions and women's groups, farming bodies etc.) structured around a national-developmentalist agenda but also an ethno-religious one. The effects of this process – in widespread popular collaboration with a "carceral Catholicism" manifested in industrial schools, Magdalen asylums and widespread physical and sexual abuse – have left a politics of memory comparable to that of post-fascist states in Europe and Latin America.

"Movement-become-state" also highlights the complexities of these new forms of mobilisation / organisation / institutionalisation; the challenge of theorising co-optation in social movement activity (eg ritualised forms of direct action by "insider" farmers' groups) and its effects on internal power relationships within movements (institutionalised leadership vs rank-and-file); the use of movement pasts to legitimate the official present (including in intellectual and academic work), etc. Tovey and Share (2003: 462 – 9) have attempted to use new social movement theory to analyse the development of lay Catholic fundamentalist organising around issues such as divorce and abortion in the 1980s and 1990s.

The ways in which these relationships shaped movement discourses (towards a focus on "issues" and "problems" and an often unquestioned reliance on policy mechanisms and state power, with the intervening steps of popular mobilisation and mediation with the state largely left unspoken) are a heightened form of a situation familiar across Europe but which is often taken for granted rather than subjected to critical enquiry by scholars – whose interests and whose agency, within movements and outside them, are represented by this mode of discourse? In recent Irish history, processes of "social partnership" (including trade unions in tripartite corporatist arrangements from 1987 until the late 2000s and the "community and voluntary sector" for a rather shorter span) have had powerful effects on movement organising

which demand greater critical analysis – in particular as this process is now ending, with access to policy and funding increasingly barred, movement elites unable to return to strategies of mass mobilisation and traditional movement supporters increasingly disaffiliated from institutional survival strategies.

At the origins of "movement-become-state" in the south – and in the takeover of the northern state by conservative (unionist) movements relying on populist mobilisation of the Protestant working class – lies the relationship between social movements and revolution, recently rediscovered in the "Dynamics of Contention" literature but a central structuring fact of Irish history. Although Irish history post-1798 is not exceptionally violent by global standards, movement actors and opponents have adopted a particularly violence-oriented *rhetoric*, with strong religious and legitimating overtones (whether of martyrdom or of "Peace") and Irish republicanism is one of the last long-term movements in Europe to maintain the Blanquist tradition of conspiratorial insurrectionalism.

More broadly, the relationship between movement, revolution and state has been as important in the case of nationalism in Ireland as for anti-fascist resistance in western Europe and subsequent state legitimacy. These relationships are rarely considered as integral to social movement scholarship; but the very self-restrictions under which European movements typically operate (the awareness of the limits within which they can challenge state power without facing violent repression) is shaped by this wider history.

Two specific aspects of this are crucial at present, in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe. One is a more adequate theorisation of movement waves (1789, 1848, 1916-24, anti-fascist resistance, 1968, 1989-90, movement of movements) and their

relationship both to long-term processes of social change and to transformations in state structure and regimes of accumulation. In particular, if there is merit in Arrighi's (2004) analysis of relatively short-lived regimes of accumulation (e.g. as between Fordism and neoliberalism) and that of Wainwright (1994) and Lash / Urry (1987) of the relationship between the movements of 1968 and the crumbling of Fordism, what should be said of the long-term conflict between neoliberalism and European movements: going back into the mid-1990s, forcing a retreat from metropolitan summits by the mid-2000s, dealing substantial blows to the Bush project of permanent war in the same period and now intensifying as anti-austerity movements in many parts of Europe, with a consequent crisis of legitimacy in countries such as Greece, Italy and Ireland where Troika rules have in effect amounted to a soft coup against popular pressure? What needs to be theorised is not simply (as autonomists have it) the development of popular protest but equally the relative immunity of states to such protest at present. In other words, we need a movement-relevant analysis of the nature of power and struggle in the end years of neoliberalism – and one which indicates how movements might not simply contribute to dismantling it but also play a decisive role in shaping whatever comes next.

A final point which the Irish experience highlights is the role of culture, in various dimensions. One is that of movement milieux, alternative scenes and counter-cultures. Few movements (in Ireland or elsewhere) are entirely independent of one another, but the boundaries between them have not been adequately theorised. For example, what does it mean to treat the anti-nuclear power movement as part of the environmental movement or separate to it? Environmentalism and alternative lifestyles? Feminism and lesbian activism? Peace movements and the left? These are

practical boundary and definition issues for movement strategists and organisers to whom research which starts with an axiomatic definition of its object has nothing to say.

In Ireland, where the relationship between radical movements and cultural change has been even more pronounced than elsewhere – moving rapidly from "traditional", rhetorically rural, conservative Catholicism to a "modern" western European culture – the relationship between political and cultural movements requires more research. My own work on counter cultures, new religious movements and western Buddhism (Cox 2011; Cosgrove et al. 2011; Cox 2013a) has attempted one approach but far more remains to be done, not least in terms of understanding how such movements contribute to social change, often an explicit goal. Particular attention should be paid to movement media, the reception of cultural material from abroad, and the contexts within which both political and cultural movements organise (in Dublin, for example, they have routinely had to use the same rooms, the same noticeboards, and the same people).

As Hugh MacDiarmaid noted, the universal *is* the particular. This is what each specific movement landscape contributes to our understanding of other landscapes.

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