

# Place, Scale and Limit with Respect to Landscape and Environment

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## ENVIRONMENT AND LANDSCAPE

Environment and landscape are not synonymous, though their semantic fields interfere to some degree. Landscape has always something to do with sensitiveness and subjectivity, whereas environment can incontestably be instituted into a scientific object, as is the case in ecology or in the Earth sciences in general. Yet there have indeed been many attempts to objectify landscape positively, notably in the Soviet Union with *landschaftovedenie*; but such disciplines have precisely neglected what distinguishes landscape from environment, namely, that the former implies a human subject (individual or collective), whereas the latter does not necessarily need one. Not only does environment not need the existence of humanity (even as an object), but many ecologists have considered Man as a trouble maker, and some have even recommended its elimination for the sake of remarkable ecosystems. Landscape, on the contrary, is eminently human. Still more, it is narrowly cultural, as shown by the fact that in the history of Mankind, there have been only two civilizations which acknowledged and celebrated landscape as such: China (and her disciples), since the first centuries of the Christian era, then Europe since the Renaissance. Yet all societies have an environment.

It is necessary to distinguish landscape and environment from two points of view. On the one hand, in order that ethnocentrism and individual subjectiveness do not interfere in the judgments which we have to pass, on the functioning of the ecosystems and of the biosphere. As much as possible, we must institute ecosystems and the biosphere into objects of science, and as such, moral and aesthetic values have in principle nothing to do with them. On the other hand, we must distinguish landscape and environment in order to avoid a dictatorial extrapolation of scientific data into the domain of ethics and aesthetics. It does not suffice, far from it, that ecosystems run smoothly for the landscape to be beautiful, nor that the inhabitants be virtuous; nor the reverse, of course.

Yet, the ideal situation would be that all these go together: that the environment be sound, while the landscape would be pleasant; to say nothing of the society, which would be just. Many people of goodwill, indeed, do their utmost to realize such a har-

mony; but the social sciences have shown that, in the last resort, it belongs to edenic myths, or to rationalistic utopias. In fact, in the disenchanted world which modernity has brought forth, the True, the Beautiful and the Good hardly go together, or rather, they are dissociated by right: science, art and morals must not interfere, lest they fall respectively into error, sterility and injustice.

The plight of modernity is that we cannot be satisfied with such a dislocation of our world, because it leads to nonsense. We cannot live in a world devoid of aesthetical and moral values, nor can we do without the factual and neutral world of science. Particularly, we need both to project our subjectiveness onto the landscape, and to manage objectively the ecosystems of our environment. The fact is, nevertheless, that to juxtapose or alternate these two points of view is not enough for giving a sense to our relationship with the world: either it is the landscape which we cannot grasp, or it is the environment.

The modern world has thus been split into two irreconcilable halves: a physical one, and a phenomenal one. In the former half, which is that of the environment, it is the earth which revolves about the sun. It is the world of Galileo (*Eppur, si muove*, 1633). In the latter half, that of the landscape, it is the sun which rises and sets on the earthly horizon. It is the world of Husserl (who wrote in 1934 that the Earth, as the Subject's proper Soil, does not move).

Such has been the alternative of modernity: on one side, the physical and intelligible world of environment; on the other side, the phenomenal and sensible world of landscape.

## IDENTIFICATION AND IDENTITY

The sensible world of landscape is woven with symbols and associations which make these things affect us, perhaps precisely inasmuch as they always also evoke other things which are not out there but within ourselves, in our memory, or which effectively go together with them in the landscape out there. For instance, a line of willows will evoke the brook which it hides, or a steeple will evoke the presence of a village. Such associations belong to metonymy. Other ones belong to metaphor: for instance, the forms of a metallic shed will evoke the industrial world, or the style of a neo-vernacular summer house will evoke a revival of regionalism.

It is not necessary to expatiate about these rhetorical distinctions. The essential fact is that, in landscape, things are not limited to their own substantial *identity*: they always are, besides, the base of an *identification* which make them, and in them we also feel other things. This is why landscape is unitarily integrated, with us, and why it makes sense, for us; a sense which is all the richer as these identifications will develop more broadly their sets of correspondances.

In other words, landscape belongs to a metaphorical or symbolical logic, where A is not only A but also non-A.

According to the modern alternative which has been defined above, environment belongs on the contrary to a logic in which the things and the facts are what they are: a

logic of identity, in which A is A, not non-A. It is this logic which, in the seventeenth century, founded the dualism of the modern classical Western paradigm, and consequently brought forth the emergence of modern science, by isolating the object from subjective projections. To be sure, this paradigm evacuated the identifications, correspondances and analogies which, until then, had confused environment and landscape into one same milieu - a world woven with human metaphors.

The notion of physics. It is related, in fact, with the modern alternative, which split the Western view of the world into two incompatible points of view, one physical and the other phenomenal, and generated the necessity to invent a term for the latter, in which were kept alive the identifications which were driven out of the former.

On the contrary, the other great civilizations did not (at least effectively) distinguish the phenomenal from the physical. They went on either ignoring landscape - as did India or Islam - or, like China, maintaining it within a tight set of analogies with cosmology, which for that reason could not - contrary to the Occident - emancipate itself from the phenomenal and find the firm ground of the physical.

There are many causes to this emancipation of the modern Western cosmology from the phenomenal, as is well known. I shall here confine myself to underline the logical principles which brought it forth, by borrowing an outsider's look: that which some Japanese thinkers have directed onto the Western paradigm. Indeed, as do all cultural facts, the main traits of this paradigm appear more clearly when scrutinized from the outside than from the inside.

This point of view was elaborated around the Second World War in the works of a philosopher, Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) and of a linguist, Tokieda Motoki (1900-1967). It has recently been developed in the words of another philosopher, Nakamura Yūjirō (born in 1925). It consists in contrasting a logic of place, or of the identity of the predicate, with the classical logic of the identity of the subject. The latter has impregnated Western thought since Aristotle, more naturally so as it is linked with some peculiarities of the Indo-European languages. It is the logic which one generally summarizes with the principle of the excluded middle (either A or non-A), and also with the syllogism: *All men are mortals; now, Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal*. But according to Nakamura, the former logic, bearing a relation with some traits of the Japanese language which I cannot detail here, belongs to the identification process which is at work in the following example (borrowed by Nakamura from psychiatry): *I am a virgin; now, Saint Mary is a virgin; therefore, I am Saint Mary*. This kind of logic has been called "paleologic". It is at work in our moods, intuitions and inspirations.

Be that as it may, the peculiarities of the Indo-European languages partook in some way in the establishment of the modern classical Western paradigm, contributing for instance in giving a firm identity to the individual subject. Nakamura sums up this paradigm with the figures of Cartesian dualism and of Newtonian space. This absolute space is devoid of singularities. It is homogeneous, isotropic and infinite. As such, it has been the condition of the development of modern scientific objectivity, which attached itself to the measurement and manipulation of the objects appearing in this space, in proportion to the withdrawal of the modern subject within himself. It is also in this

space that modernity displayed its peculiar, instrumental rationality.

In short, this paradigm structured a worldview which, according to Nakamura, excluded the expression of a logic of place. Such a vision was literally utopic, in that it negated singular places (*ou-topos*=no-place).

We need not here follow Nakamura into some developments of his theory, in which he compares the logic of place and contemporary physics. Our topic being environment and landscape, let us rather remark that the modern movement in architecture, especially the international style which emanated from it, has produced the most palpable expression of an absolute, universal space, as opposed to the singularity of places, and of a logic of identity, impervious to contextual identifications. It is indeed identic geometrical forms which, all over the planet, have invaded our ecumene, in the name of functionalism (i.e. instrumental rationality), of the precedence of the physical (the engineer's point of view) over the phenomenal (the poet's point of view), and in the defiance of any local, vernacular context.

Today, it has become easy to denounce the aberrations — both from the point of view of environment and that of landscape — that this literally utopic tendency has been and still is entailing. To give just one example: building in the Kerguelen (a cluster of small islands in the Southern Indian Ocean), a series of dwellings with their facades turned to the South. What is more difficult is to define a rational foundation for a worldview which, while refusing to submit the ecumene to the mortiferous uniformity of universal space and instrumental rationality, would not be a mere pre-modern regression before the modern alternative, i.e. a confusion of the physical and the phenomenal, or of facts (the *is*) and values (the *ought*). Yet our times provide plenty of cases of such a regression. Typical in this respect is the shamanistic exaltation of some ecologists, who evidently invest the environment with subjective values.

We may add that the logic of place which Nakamura advocates, if it is essential for understanding the processes at work in landscape, and thus for avoiding to confuse them with environmental facts, does not seem to be enough for going beyond the modern alternative; because it does not acknowledge the fact that a logic of identity, if not sufficient, is necessary for establishing a scientific point of view, at least in the first stages of reflexion. What we need is indeed to overpass the modern alternative, not to deny or ignore it. We need to found rationally, in the same movement, both a physical and a phenomenal point of view, without confusing them (as did all pre-modern cultures), nor submitting the latter to the former (as did the modern utopia).

## LOCALNESS, FINITENESS, AND GLOBALITY

We need not recall how, since the first half of the nineteenth century, the modern classical paradigm has been questioned in such various domains as geometry, physics and psycho-analysis. Let us only retain that space, and subject/object duality, which have been relativized. What imports us here is to understand how such a relativization can enable us to grasp environment and landscape in other terms than those of the modern alternative, without receding back to the confusions of pre-modernity.

Considering the notions of *limit* and *horizon* can be useful in this respect. Horizon is the limit which, phenomenally, enables the sun to rise, and thus sets up a landscape. The essence of landscape is indeed to be localized by the origin of a look which the horizon bounds. There is no possible landscape in a boundless space. Neither horizon nor landscape exist in the infinity of Newtonian space. A tangible proof of this impossibility can be seen in the effects of the international style: its rectangular shapes, operating in the neutral space of instrumental rationality, have devastated urban and rural landscapes all over the world. Indeed, by replacing the singularity of real places with the uniformity of a universal space, this style annihilates landscape. By the same token, it abolishes all vernacular horizons.

From an optical (i.e. physical) point of view, of course, a horizon remains even around the towers and bars of high-rise collective housing. Yet, as we have seen, the horizon belongs to the phenomenal rather than to the physical. It is fraught with values and symbols. Likewise, the horizon of landscape differs from a mere physical limit. As a matter of fact, the very word "horizon" lends itself to a great number of metaphorical uses, in which it generally means the end (as limit or target) of a certain way of seeing, understanding or feeling. The aesthetics of landscape, those of China for instance, have a horizon which corresponds with the limits of a given culture. Beyond this limit, landscape is perceived, represented and managed in other ways. Within this limit, landscapes and much more than diversely localized portions of physical space: they partake organically in the cosmogenesis of a world which makes sense.

The greatness of the modern utopia is to have radically questioned, in the name of reason and freedom, all the horizons which were limiting knowledge. Its drama is to have, by the same movement, impoverished the sense of the places where Mankind really lives. Systematically referred to the unlimitedness of universal space, the singularity of real places was losing all its *raison d'être*, especially in the narrowly technical and economical terms of instrumental rationality. Hence this disparagement of sense, peculiar to the modern alternative, which seems, in return, to have stimulated the recent need for landscape amenities in our cities.

As a matter of fact, since the eighteenth century, notably in the romantic school, it is most often in irrational terms that the people's attachment for singular places and landscapes has been expressed. This is no wonder, considering that, in the boundless space of the modern utopia, any reference to the local becomes irrational — as fundamentally irrational as to say, in a Galilean cosmology, that the sun revolves in the sky. Indeed, it establishes a horizon where no limit can be supposed.

Now, not to mention the denial of universal space in geometry and in physics, the modern utopia has come up against a new limit in the last third of the twentieth century; a limit which, henceforth, does not pertain only to the unstable horizons of phenomenology, but is grounded in the very objectiveness of the natural sciences. This limit, or new horizon, is the ecological finiteness of our planet.

There is need to expatiate about this finiteness of the earth. What imports us here is that this discovery entailed, in our ways of thinking, a revolution in the relationship between the local and the global. As a matter of fact, in the systemic world of ecology,

the biosphere (the global) and the biotopes (the local) are interdependent. This interdependence of the local and the global disrupts the driving principle of the modern utopia, which tended to abolish singular places (the local) to the profit to its universal space. Nowadays, the singularity of each place is invested with a new necessity, to the very degree of the growing necessity to take into account global balances. The biosphere constitutes an insuperable horizon, which founds the necessity of each local horizon.

### A LOGIC OF SCALE

The problem comes — at least partially — to that of reference. We know by now, especially since Gödel's theorem, that the validity of a system of reference can be proved only by referring to the outside of that system; which establishes another system of another scale; and so on. This founds a scale of validity, which means that the validity of any one system is always relative.

The decisive point here is that relativity is not falseness. If the validity of a superior system is more general than that of an inferior one, it does not mean that the statements which are valid in the frame of inferior systems are false. They would be false only if it was possible to oppose to them the absolute validity of a terminal system; which is impossible, as Gödel's theorem shows. Reversely, it would be false to deny the validity of a local system in the name of a universal one.

Let us immediately add that this does not open the door to a rampant relativism (which would assert that all singularities are equally valid). It only amounts to saying that, in terms of logic, there are different levels of validity, as there are different levels of generality.

Now, if one refers these logical principles to what has been shown above concerning the relation of the global with the local, one can delineate the rational and scientific bases of a worldview which overcomes the modern alternative between the physical (which lies beyond and horizon) and the phenomenal (which lies on this side of the horizon). Indeed, in such a view, it becomes both true and necessary to say, at the same time, that the sun rises on the horizon and that the earth revolves about the sun. It is no more possible to deny the validity of the local by invoking the universality of science and reason, because science and reason themselves, on the contrary, command us to respect the local for the sake of the global, and reciprocally. Likewise, it is no more admissible to destroy landscapes, by abolishing the singular qualities of places for the sake of a universal space which science has discarded. What is scientific and rational, today, is to respect and create original places, to the very extent that we must now think and act at the global scale which has become ours.

Needless to add, this scalar view is in no ways a return to pre-modernity, in which the vernacular existed only because the planetary was effectively out of reach, that is, physically beyond the horizon. The global is not the local, and the physical is not the phenomenal, but their respective relationship is no more an alternative between truth and error, reality and illusion: it is a matter of scale between different levels of generali-

ty, just as there are different ecological levels between any singular biotope and the biosphere.