

A WINTER LANDSCAPE with A BRIDGE

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A bridge is a construction in both the technical meaning of the word, thus being a term, and in its etymological meaning – it is a constructed path. A bridge is a construction that ensures the unbreakable continuation of a road or a path across a body of water, across another road, across a chasm, a mountain pass or some other obstacle. As such, the bridge is, above all, a part of the road. At the same time, it alters the character of the road, it brings the vertical dimension into the landscape and it can be perceived as a special place on the road. Two main structural elements of man's existential space – a road and a place – are united in the bridge. The bridge is both a road and a place.

The bridge is an artefact, which has been loaded with aesthetical value and symbolic meaning, being used as a worn-out metaphor to describe all kinds of connections in a very wide range of spheres of life.

1. Georg Simmel, one of the most influential 20th-century thinkers in sociology and cultural philosophy, used the example of the bridge in his essay, "A Bridge and a Door," written rather late in his life, to explain the metaphysical relationship between human beings and the landscape (Simmel 1996: 1481–86). Simmel firmly believes that existential topography is based on the idea of space being shaped by man. Both the material world and the perception of this world have a transcendental dimension. The location of a human being in space reveals the essence of the human being. According to Simmel, objects are inevitably separated in space and none of the particles of the matter can have a common space with other particles. Human beings are the only ones that have the ability to connect and separate, and as always, one of these actions is a precondition for the other. We do associate, either practically or logically, only things that have previously been separated.

The construction of a road between two places is one of the greatest human achievements; the will to connect becomes the act of shaping things. The build-

ing of roads is a generically human achievement. An animal also follows its certain paths, but this does not bring forth a miracle – such movement does not freeze into anything permanent. An achievement of such kind reaches its peak with the construction of a bridge. The bridge symbolises the expansion of our will over space. For a human being the riverbanks are not only apart, but also "separated" from each other, as without the need to connect them, such separateness would not have any meaning for us. Nature has separated things and has, thus, created a precondition for connecting these things. But a bridge, which connects separated things because of a practical need, obtains aesthetical value through the observability of such a connection. The simple dynamics of movement have seemingly become a lasting object. The bridge not only bears the functional and purposeful side of our movements as a tool, but it also transforms it into a directly convincing plastic form. Simmel compares a bridge to a portrait, as a portrait also seemingly halts the bodily and spiritual processes of life, and gathers reality into a single timelessly stable view. Differently from a work of art, the bridge with its synthesis, which exceeds nature, can still be fitted into a landscape. For a human eye, a plot of land is hidden under a house, but the relationship of the bridge with a river is still visible. The bridge is perceived as a "picturesque" element of the landscape, since the occasionality of nature has been overcome by spiritual unity. The bridge obtains its aesthetical value simply by such rendering of spiritual unity to the natural. Simmel treats unity as an ideal island-like closure. The bridge raises us higher above everyday trivia and creates, for a moment, a miraculous feeling of floating between the earth and the sky.

Conclusion

1. A bridge connects and thereby creates an ontological feeling of security.
2. A bridge expresses frozen movement.
3. A bridge emphasises, supports and creates a landscape; thanks to this, the landscape can be observed as a work of art.

Movement (time) has become spatial in Simmel's bridge. Dynamics obtain an aesthetical meaning through halting and freezing, through an ideal closure. A bridge is a visual image concerning space-time, making the metaphysical observable. By the bridge man connects spatially dispersed objects (the finite with the infinite), but also time and space.

2. Martin Heidegger gave a lecture, *Bauen. Wohnen. Denken* (Heidegger 1996: 343–363), at a symposium, "Man and Space," in Darmstadt in 1951, and used a bridge as an example in the discussion of the semantic and functional openness of a place.

Just as Simmel, Heidegger also begins his discussion with the idea of a connecting function of a bridge. Being a place (*Ort*) itself, the bridge gathers together both the land and landscape. The bridge and the banks of a river or a stream, connected by the bridge, are not located in the indefinite anymore. The banks become the banks only when the bridge crosses the stream. The banks are not neutral edges of dry land anymore; the bridge creates the stream and the land. The piers of the bridge allow the stream to continue its course. The bridge covers the stream for a moment and frees it again, at the same time enabling man to follow his path. The bridge either in a city, in a village or on a highway again and anew creates a connection, making it possible for man to cross the water.

Gathering (*Versammlung*) is etymologically related to the word *thing*. In older Germanic languages *thing* (*Ding, thing, Tīng*) denotes not only an object, but also an event (Bonsdorff 1998: 212). The bridge is a thing that evokes a place, but not only that. A thing, as the bridge, can express more, and as such an expression, it can become a symbol. The bridge reveals to us the people's dwelling: it is the symbolic form of dwelling, yet a place is not created by a symbol, but by people's dwelling on the earth. "But the bridge, if it is a true bridge, is never first of all a mere bridge and then afterward a symbol. And just as little is the bridge in the first place exclusively a symbol, in the sense that it expresses something that strictly speaking does not belong to it." (Heidegger 1996: 355.) If we examine the bridge as such, it marks nothing else and it never expresses anything. Heidegger thinks that we underestimate the essence of things and habitually perceive them first and only then add the meaning to them. A place can be created by something that itself is a place. Heidegger contrasts a thing as a practical, technical or scientific object with a thing as a place that reveals the truth of Being. A bridge is merely a thing and as such it gathers and draws together the quadruplicity (*das Geviert*) of the sky and the earth, the divine and the mortals (Heidegger 1996: 356, 361–363). A bridge as a place allows us to experience the uniqueness and unity of space in two ways: first, it creates the feeling that we belong to the world, and second, it allows us to enter the world. Mathematically abstract space is unique and unified, but it contains no places,

there are no bridges. Contrary to this, between the places, space is always as an interval, a distance and an ambit. The place created by the bridge establishes space, which contains a number of different places near and far from the bridge. These places can be considered simply as points in a measurable distance. In an abstract space the bridge is only a point, replaceable with some other thing. Mathematics does not reveal the essence of space; Heidegger considers a place as the key to the understanding of the relationship between man and space. Man experiences his usual surrounding space as a relationship between places and distances. Space as such is neither an external object nor an inner experience. Space is not located in front, on the surface or around. We do not think about the bridge as an object, but neither is it our inner image. Man's space is created by the place, by dwelling (Heidegger 1996: 357–359).

To dwell (*wohnen*) means to settle in, to be located, to feel at home. Dwelling is the way people inhabit the earth. Man's Being is based on his ability to cultivate the land and defend it from senseless exploitation. Building (*bauen*) has originally meant erecting, securing the raising of things, shooting from the earth into the sky towards the light. The sky means the protection of the mortals by the divine. In its older meaning *bauen* was also caring and keeping (cultivating as well as constructing). The aim of building is, thus, dwelling in a way that protects and keeps the quadruplicity – the unified presence of the earth, the sky, the divine and the mortals – in their essential spreading into things. Things keep the quadruplicity only when they are allowed to be in accordance with their essence. Dwelling can be seen in architecture and in technical constructions, in a house and in the bridge. Dwelling, building and thinking are inseparable (Heidegger 1996: 347–353, 361–363).

Conclusion

1. A bridge gathers and draws together the land as a landscape (i.e. a natural environment – *K. L.*).
2. A bridge has both social and cultural functions. It not only connects the landscape, but also creates a connection between the places where the people live, work and act, thus supporting human relationships.
3. On the metaphysical plane, a bridge draws together in its own way the sky and the earth, the divine and the mortals. Dwelling is revealed in the bridge.

Dwelling is the main characteristic of Being. The aesthetical value of the bridge can be found in revealing the truth of Being.

3. Comments. Heidegger continues Simmel's idea that time is incarnated in a spatial thing – a bridge. A bridge as a road and as a place gathers and draws together space, at the same time also drawing time into itself and around itself. In 1949 Heidegger published an article, *Holzweg* (Heidegger 1993: 238–241), stating that a road, meandering between the fields and meadows, embodies life, thought, work and sacred time. Nevertheless, we can claim that the time embodied in Simmel's and Heidegger's bridge is abstract. As a part of the landscape and as a construction of symbolic meaning the bridge is subjected to the change of seasons. The metaphor of the bridge, rendered by both Simmel and Heidegger, is based on an image of a bridge crossing water, being thus a bridge in the spring, summer or autumn landscape, and excluding the winter landscape. In winter the essential purpose of the bridge is weakened or entirely lost. The bridge does not connect the separated banks anymore. A frozen road gives way to a new freedom of movement – skiing, skating, sledding or walking across and along the frozen and snowy river. The frozen river is a bridge itself, and even more, it is a "frozen movement" (Simmel 1996: 1485). Thus the symbolic meaning of the bridge weakens as well. The bridge is not a special place anymore, crossing an obstruction and determining the direction of our movement. The bridge is only a sign, marking a crossroads. Frost unites the landscape, paving roads in bogs and swamps, making passable all bottomless field tracks, village roads and forest paths. Winter roads are bridges in both a pragmatic and symbolic meaning. The Nordic winter experience is older than the building of bridges. Can this be considered as the semantic deep layer of the metaphor of the bridge? The labour division among traditional peoples depended (and still depends) on natural seasons. Winter chores required winter roads. The fact that winter radically changes our experience of the landscape is important as well. The identity of the locality of an island is lost – it is not separated by water anymore, an element of the landscape, closed by openness. A bog is not a chaotic mixture of water and land, the soft and solid, the firm and infirm anymore. We can cross bodies of water at the most convenient places – go straight across them. Man can experience the miracle of walking across water. This is a divine

experience, mixed with a feeling of danger. We see the depth under our feet through a thin layer of ice, hear the sounds of water through cracks in the ice, but at the same time, in spite of the fragility of the ice, feel the firm surface under our feet. The state of water has changed, the meanings of oppositions – solid–liquid, dry–wet, strong–fragile – have transformed, and we even perceive different substances differently. Winter transforms the landscape into a unified continuous space. The winter horizon is special, as the sky, the land and the sea often merge into one another in indistinguishable dark and light colours. They do not contrast each other, their difference can be seen in the nuances of grey and white. At the same time, light and dark may change places, the sea and the land can be lighter than the sky. The winter landscape is as a negative picture of the summer one. The images of death, sleep and a shroud have become stereotypical in the semantics of such "negativity," but a different, metaphysical interpretation is also possible – a winter landscape in its snowy and frozen unity can give us an idea of an infinite space, which could be the basis for our imaginings of sacral and sacred space or a mathematically modelled Universe. Winter connects, but also separates, making people seek shelter from the cold. Therefore, we tend to forget the first, roadpaving and connecting effect of winter.

Simmel and Heidegger did not examine the different effects of the seasons. But the ontological state of the bridge in a winter landscape differs drastically from that in summer. Frost – nature itself – was the first builder of bridges. A wintry bridge is a bridge amongst a paved landscape, where it is just as if waiting for the breaking of ice to resume its importance. Winter deheroises the bridge.

Simmel's and Heidegger's archetype of the bridge does not accommodate many bridges because of their dimensions. Seemingly, their metaphor of the bridge was based on the notion of a romantic bridge of comfortable dimensions crossing a comfortably small river or stream. The function of the bridge – to be a part of the road – can be fulfilled by a culvert or a dam. These constructions also enable us to cross a river, a ditch or a stream. And the longitudinal winter waterway along the river is disrupted, divided into segments. Water flows on, but man has to make a detour on the riverbank in order to continue his way along the river. A low bridge of lesser dimensions connects, but also separates. A bridge can also hinder the course of ships along the river. The traffic problems of St. Petersburg, Amsterdam, Delft and other cities have been solved by the opening of bridges. The opening of bridges has become a peculiar ritual in city life.

Similar rituals can be found on dammed rivers, where shipping is regulated by systems of locks.

The bridge breaks the landscape not only horizontally, but also vertically. Large railway bridges, highway viaducts or huge suspension bridges across islands raise people high between the sky and the earth. "Flying" in a car over the islands of Rhode Island gives one a magic feeling. A view from above, such as from the Eiffel Tower or from a plane, offers a unique, divine view over a landscape. The bridge and the plane are the incarnations of the dream of a flying carpet. At the same time, such a distanced experience allows one to get a cartographic view of the landscape. Similarly to a tower, the bridge opens up a panoramic view, creating the possibility of passive contemplation of the landscape. The landscape, the city "offers itself to him as an object virtually *prepared*, exposed to the intelligence, but which he (the looker from a tower – *K. L.*) must himself construct by a final activity of the mind" (Barthes 1997: 176). The paradox of the bridge resembles that of the tower, described by Barthes – a panoramic view over the landscape is the most passive way of perception, accompanied by an active reasonable interpretation. The bridge lifts man out of the landscape, separates him from it, and the landscape ceases to be an object of immediate perception. Visuality persists and even strengthens, but other bodily senses do not participate in the process. And from afar, the bridge itself is only a picture.

Analysing the bridge as an aesthetic phenomenon, we should keep apart the aesthetical perception of the bridge and the perception of the landscape from the bridge. But as we consider the bridge as a part of the unified landscape, it is, unfortunately, not possible to the end.

Being on the bridge, we cannot leave aside the bodily movement, the bodily presence. When we change the location of the body in space, its height from the ground and water (or from snow and ice) becomes important. When we lift the viewpoint, the landscape changes, and as this is also the view from the centre (we look around), the bridge really does draw the landscape around it together into a place.

From a moderate height the bridge enables us to perceive the landscape as a harmonious, beautiful and unified environment. With the increasing height the basis of the aesthetical experience also changes – the overcoming of the fear of heights forms the basis rather for a divine than an aesthetical experience. The perception of both the bridge and the landscape depends on the fact that we

move or have stopped. As a place, the bridge halts movement for a time, pausing its natural rhythm. The place is characterised by a more intense perception. The movement does not even need to stop, but the flow of perception, or the psychical automatism, supported by the rhythm of walking (or driving), stops on the bridge. The bridge as a special place on the road "awakens" perception, activates it or even makes it conscious. Previous experiences, memories and knowledge of bridges unite in the act of perception. The aesthetical experience, received from the bridge, is thus not connected only with vision. Even the bridge itself is the source of an aesthetical experience not merely as a picture, or a visual image. The senses, memory, imagination and the knowledge in both the conscious and unconscious form render meaning to every act of immediate perception.

The bridge can be seen from afar, when reaching it, standing on it, or being under it. The surface of the bridge divides space vertically, breaking it into the upper and lower parts. The person under the bridge experiences an unusual danger from above. The effect of a half-closed and dark underside of the bridge resembles that of a tunnel or of trenches in the battleground (Jay 1994: 212–216). Such an experience is short-lived for those who drive through under the bridge, but for a pedestrian, this state of anxiety could last longer. Arrival at the aesthetical experience may be difficult, or it may even be totally excluded. Thus the bridge also disrupts the road running through from under the bridge, and in such a disruption negative feelings predominate. Being under the bridge is like being trapped. Escape from under and from within restores the freedom of movement. The bridge is a psychological obstacle here, which we have to overcome. This is a fictitious experience of space, as we move on the same plane, but still perceive the bridge as something that presses us into the ground. This primeval fear or anxiety is, fortunately, a fleeting feeling.

Conclusion

1. From the spatial aspect

- a) a bridge allows a 360° view over the landscape; it draws the landscape into a circle on the horizontal plane;
- b) it adds the vertical dimension to the landscape and breaks it into the upper and lower parts;
- c) it can be observed as a bodily experienced part of the landscape – from afar, the vision prevails, but when the observer is moving on the bridge or under it, other senses participate in the aesthetic perception.

2. From the temporal aspect the bridge is not only an abstract and static spatial-temporal image, but it is also dynamic and constantly changing in accordance with the geographical and climatic conditions of the given season. The movement and position of a body in space form an essential part in the emergence and transformation of the dynamic images of the bridge and the landscape – the bridge as a place is the part of the road that preconditions movement. The bridge is not merely a thing (Heidegger), nor a picture (Simmel), but an event (Heidegger). The changing of seasons gives us different experiences of the landscape with the bridge. The identity of the location of the bridge shifts according to the seasons. The symbols of winter change as well. The bridge reveals the road-building effect of winter. Winter is neither sleep nor death anymore, but also a bridge. Winter reveals the unifying effect of nature; man is not the only one to build bridges.

3. From the metaphysical aspect the bridge is the symbol of man's being between the sky and the earth. The bridge is like the Tree of the World – its roots in the earth, its branches in the sky. Man's path is laid in the middle zone, between the sky and the earth, not simply on the earth. His separateness from the earth emphasises the perception of the threefold division of the world and makes it observable. Winter adds the experience of the horizonless landscape and allows the divine experience of infinity.

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