

LANDSCAPES' WAYS

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Foreword

Meaning arises contextually. A landscape exists in different contexts. A simple corollary is that landscapes have different meanings, different dimensions.

According to the Nietzschean view the world we know is given to us through the images we have of it (Douglas 1996). Interpretation is not the way to truth but rather a means of creating truth. Every interpretation will remain partial, inconclusive. The more we say about a landscape, the more we have to say about it.

In my paper I will examine landscapes within different frameworks. The meaning of a landscape will be introduced rather than uncovered. (What would there be behind the cover? Another covering, in the way of infinite regression!)

The basic idea here is that every interpretation is an act of appropriation from a particular perspective. Knowledge is a network of meanings within a certain framework. As the framework changes, so will the picture. What we will have is a constellation of meanings, not a final picture. With landscapes, no final truth exists.

The landscapes I will write about are remote (scientific), intimate (experiential) and concretely abstract (belonging to the human condition).

Remote

In the 1920s, Finnish geographer J. G. Granö gave reasons for a specific system of geographical landscape studies. In his book *Pure Geography*, recently published in English, Granö states that:

"The perceived environment forms the object of geographical research, an object which still belongs to natural science even though we also direct our attention to human beings and their activities insofar as these can be perceived by the senses and fall within the complex being studied" (Granö 1997: 9; emphasis in original – P.T.K.).

I will follow some lines of argumentation presented in *Pure Geography* (hereafter abbreviated as PG).

The examination of the perceived environment starts "from a purely anthropocentric standpoint: that is, what a person, forming the centre of his perceived environment, can observe at various distances" (PG: 18). The environment thus defined can be divided quantitatively into two major parts on the basis of distances in the field of vision (PG: 19):

- I Proximity (proximate environment)
perceived by all the senses
- II Landscape (distant environment)
perceived by sight alone

Proximity is "a close, intimate world, which we always inhabit and in which context we perceive our geographical object with all our senses." This arena of our activities is then surrounded by the landscape, which is "nothing more than a field of vision more or less tinged with blue by the air" (PG: 18). The inner boundary of a landscape against the proximity cannot be defined accurately; 100–200 metres from the observer could be the distance beyond which a landscape can be clearly perceived. The outer boundary of the landscape is the range of vision, which depends on the height of the place of observation and the relief. The landscape extends to the horizon separating the earth from the sky. On a flat, horizontal surface (for example, an open plain) the outer boundary of the landscape (the radius of view) depends solely on the height of the eye above this surface. If one's eyes are at a height of 1.5 metres from the ground, the outer boundary of the landscape will be 4.7 kilometres away (PG: 52–53). In this sense, the landscape is given by trigonometry.

In pitch-dark night one cannot perceive the landscape. The landscape will be there only if "we can see at least a part of the sky and perhaps a spot of light twinkling in the dark or the shimmering surface of a lake or some other body of water" (PG: 49). For the landscape to be perceptible a minimum amount of light is necessary. This means that the pure geographical landscape can never be a purely mental act but demands a real-world material correlative.

According to the delimitation of the perceived environment there are two concentric zones surrounding us: the small proximity and the much larger landscape running towards the horizon. The zones surrounding us this way move

from one place to another as we move. In our movement new elements continuously emerge in our perceived environment as others disappear from it:

"Our proximity and landscape move in the direction of our movement to new phenomenal spaces, and the anthropocentric spaces of our perception cover new areas bound to objects and the surface of the earth and affect the senses in various ways" (PG: 26).

The process is anthropocentric at the outset but not in the end. The image of the perceived environment pure geography finally strives after is not kinaesthetic but one brought to a stop, so to say. What is needed is "a simple abstraction [that leads] us from anthropocentric environments to complexes related to the surface of the earth, which possess fixed boundaries: that is, to regions and areas which constitute uniform complexes in some way as far as their landscape or proximity features are concerned" (PG: 26; emphasis omitted – *P.T.K.*) As the anthropocentric kinaesthesia "turns" to the morphography of geographical regions with fixed boundaries, a new terminology is needed: "the area corresponding to proximity could be called a vicinity, and that corresponding to landscape ... a locality" (PG: 27; emphasis omitted). Both of them are capable of being represented by means of certain cartographic techniques.

We can see that in pure geography the senses are in focus, but in a somewhat estranged way. This of course is a direct outcome of the point of departure of the project: anything that is not naturally scientifically definable and analysable should be ruled out from the system at the outset. Even though it is anthropocentric at the outset, the morphographic system does not speak of the perceiving person's inner life: that is, feelings and emotions. The natural scientific demand of the project rules this out. In direct language:

"Would it not be quite inexcusable, however, for us to place principal emphasis on the arousal of aesthetic emotions and praise for the beautiful and sublime when carrying out our investigations and presenting our results to others, since to do so would be to consciously lay the path open to whims and caprices?" (PG: 8.)

No whims, no caprices! No feelings, no emotions! Just generic geographic regions.

Intimate

Intimate landscape perception means experiencing the landscape at the (ontological) ground level. Intimate perception embraces not only the visual images but also the images of touch and smell, taste and sound; in short, the whole gamut of meaningful sensory attractions, all that are in connection with a person's existential situation in his/her place. Perception is a triangle-drama in which the body, self and place operate together. Perception, on the whole, is synaesthetic and as such keenly intertwined with the sediments of biographical memory.

To illustrate my point I shall use an example drawn from creative literature. In the passage below Banana Yoshimoto describes a situation of two city dwellers – Kazami and Otohiko, woman and man – bumping into each other late at night in the street of a big Japanese city. How does Kazami's landscape show up at this particular moment? Kazami feels as follows:

"Summer was already half over. In just a matter of weeks, it would slowly fade out. I felt sad.

We bought some barley tea from a vending machine we found. The two cans rolled down and landed with a thump. The cans looked really big to me. Then, Otohiko and I sat down in front of a store on the street. Cars whizzed by at tremendous speeds. Every time a truck passed, I could feel the ground shake.

'Sitting on the street like this is cool. You can't forget where you are,' I said. 'You can really feel the night.'

'For street people, this is the way it is all the time.'

'That's true. If you lived in this, it would become normal.'

Time stopped in this space apart from daily life. I sat there watching the cars and passersby. It all looked strangely clear to me. The streetlights that stretched in a row far down the road towered closer to the sky than usual. The headlights flashed in many colours, and I heard the car horns, and a dog barking in the distance, and all the sounds of the street, and people's voices and footsteps, and the sound of a shutter flapping in the wind. I felt the humid air, the asphalt still warm from the daytime and summer's distant smells." (Yoshimoto 1994: 107–108.)

The chat goes on, new impressions arise, and troubles of love are mediated. These are very private matters in a very public space.

We will stop here. We can see that this example of environmental experience reveals the swift stream of synaesthetic perception. All the senses are at work, not only sight, but also touch, smell, hearing and taste, and all this in a co-

mingling manner. Eyes, ears, nose and skin are all involved and fused with feeling. The synaesthetic human touch draws the landscape close to us, makes it intimate.

There are more points of interest here. In this scene, in quite a literal sense, a change in perspective happens ("Otohiko and I sat down in front of a store on the street"). Consequently, the city appears differently. It becomes strikingly unusual, something that is "apart from daily life." To sit on the street in the nighttime is really to be cut off from the daily routine of simply hurrying along the sidewalks to perform one's usual business. This, of course, has to do with the human body as a measure of things. A change in body-geometry makes the ordinary look a bit strange.

Yi-Fu Tuan writes about the links between memory and the senses other than sight with a reference to his own experience. Tuan tells about his return to Sydney, Australia, over twenty years after leaving it as a child. What he expected were the deep feelings of nostalgia. But such feelings did not emerge. He could not project himself back into his childhood except as a purely intellectual exercise. The past eluded him. His old home next to a beach and many other features on the site were unaltered, but his perception was not. "My eyes failed me in my quest," Tuan says. "But my nose did not, for just as I was about to conclude that I could not go home again, a strong whiff of seaweed assaulted my nostrils, and I was thrown back to childhood. For a fleeting instant I stood on the beach, a twelve-year-old again." (Tuan 1993: 57.)

What took place here was the work of somatic biographical memory, a sensuous remembrance of the time/place past.

Joseph Brodsky tells about a recollection he thinks discloses a different kind of connection between smell and memory. Brodsky describes his arrival at Venice, Italy, as follows: "It was a windy night, and before my retina registered anything, I was smitten by a feeling of utter happiness: my nostrils were hit by what to me has always been its synonym, the smell of freezing seaweed" (Brodsky 1992: 5). The poet thinks the source of attraction of that smell was not in nostalgia (because for nostalgia, he says, in his childhood there was no impetus), but somewhere far more distant, somewhere beyond the confines of one's biography, somewhere in one's hypothalamus, even.

Deep, deep traits of culture, long, long histories of meaning! In the hidden meanings of subconscious landscapes, perhaps?

Concretely abstract

The third frame within which I will look at landscapes relates to environmental art. I will think of the stone assemblages Richard Long made during his walk in the Sahara (Long 1998). This time the artist is not the essential point (Karjalainen 2000). What is now the point is a way of interpreting the stony images, a way of employing the metaphorical potency of signs.



Figure 1. Stony circles, stony lines: images of existential geometry.
(Source: Long 1998; modified by the author.)

In the desert of Hoggar there are forms of stony lines and circles (Fig. 1). To be sure, what we have are photographic images of the forms. The images speak of existential geometry. A line is an expression of motion and hence of space, whereas a circle is an expression of shelter, hence of place. Space is motion, place is rest. Space allows spreading and progress, something that yields to an expansionist effort allowing speed and making expansive feelings and hope possible. In contrast, place refers to a site of inhabiting (Jager 1976, Walter 1980). Space is an expanse, place is a room. Space appears as something that permits growth,

expansion, and freedom, whereas place becomes a constraint and designated location:

Space is movement with no friction of walls
Place is closure with prospective doors

In journeying and dwelling, the lines and circles have a dialogue. The basic chain of figures is made up of the alteration of the place-making stops and space-allowing movement, inward-directing rooms and outward spreading horizons.

The nature of the existential spatiality, in connection with the existential temporality, can be pointed to in other geometrical terms. (To see the stone-assemblage as a circle is to see it from above, from a vertical angle. To see the stone-assemblage while standing on the ground is to figure it as an oval. To figure the forms as circles presumes a right-angled vision.) In Bernd Jager's words, "the transition from the time of dwelling to the time of journeying can be understood as the transition from a circle to an oval" (Jager 1975: 229). In the extreme case the oval can collapse and come to resemble a straight line. If the oval collapses into a straight line, the journey loses its rhythm of leaving and arriving and becomes fugue. The other way round, when the oval opens wide to become a full circle, there will be no promise of a journey in dwelling. Yet, from the human point of view, journeying should always keep an oval-like character. Leaving and arriving, moving and stopping. This dialectic is a part of the existential ground constituting one's personal identity.

The stony line made in the landscape marks two untouchable limits (Olsson 1994). At the one extreme there are the absolutely opaque stones of nature, at the other the absolutely transparent meanings of culture. The former limit is the imagined realm of pure matter, the latter the imagined realm of pure spirit. These limits are absolutes that can only be imagined. Matter and meaning so absolutely apart from each other is an untouchable thing, thus something outside the human world. Human touch leaves a trace in the landscape between the absolutes. Such is the kinaesthetic landscape of the human condition.

Coda

Pure geography's landscapes are remote and anaesthetic. The experiential landscape is intimate and synaesthetic. The landscape of the human condition is kinaesthetic. It becomes real and interpreted in our living between departure and

arrival (space), arrival and departure (place), in the on-going dialectics of human journeying and dwelling.

Three perspectives and three landscapes: scientific, experiential and existential. Landscapes of differing order rising out of differing contexts.

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