

## THE LAND AS PALIMPSEST

For Alain Lèveillé, who has much to teach us about the morphology of the city and of the land, and about proper use of them.

### I

The land has come into its own. At last it has become the focus of great national problems which until now were evoked most frequently with regard to and for the benefit of cities, or even of metropolitan areas. Its very representation, until very recent ages held to be terribly abstract and reserved to technicians, today belongs to the public domain. Exhibitions bearing titles such as *Maps and Illustrations of the Earth* (Paris, 1980) or *Landscape: Image and Reality* (Bologna, 1981) attract as many visitors as an Impressionist retrospective, not only because of the novelty of the theme, the rarity of certain documents or the beauty of most of them, as proven by the success of even more specialized events such as those dedicated to the 1730 Sardinian cadastre in Savoy or to the one of Maria-Theresa in Lombardy (Chambéry and Pavia, 1980).

Translated by R. Scott Walker.

Everything leads us to believe that, in the light of complexity and the integration of functions within the various national or regional communities, there is in Europe a general desire to stand back a bit in order better to understand the order of the questions, or at least a vague need to understand how this physical and mental entity called the land was formed and in what it consists. Many now perceive it, and rightly so, as a large ensemble enjoying specific properties, whereas an even greater number see in it a kind of panacea (to the point that in order to attract attention it sometimes suffices to associate with this concept an idea or a plan whose relation to it is not evident or is even arbitrary).

Concept? To the degree of generality in which we are here situating ourselves, it would be more prudent to speak of horizon of reference. There are, in fact, as many definitions of the land as there are disciplines associated with it: the jurists' definition hardly deals with any more than sovereignty and the various authorities accompanying it. Developers, on the other hand, speak of factors as diverse as geology, topography, technical infrastructures, productive capacity, legal order, administrative organization, national accounting, service networks, political risks and on and on, not only in the totality of their conjunctions, but dynamically by virtue of a planning project. Between these two extremes—the simple and the supercomplex—are arrayed an entire panoply of other definitions: that of the geographer, the sociologist, the ethnographer, the cultural historian, the zoologist, the botanist, the meteorologist, the political administrator, and so on. Alongside these more or less clearly defined disciplines there are additionally the approximations of everyday speech, also significant, where the word "land" can allegorize the unity of the nation or the state or can designate an expanse of cultivable territory or can refer to landscape areas set aside for recreation.

Such attention paid to a class of more general phenomena—the transformation of earth into land, so to speak—could help to eliminate a problem born of urban development in the 13th century and become classic with the advent of the industrial civilization: the town-country rivalry. I said eliminate and not resolve: by rephrasing the statement. For this rivalry is as false

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as the idea that an island is limited by water and defined by it, a landsman's thinking which has no meaning for fishermen whose unending coming and going between the land and the sea breaks down the barriers between the elements to create a necessary unity of two apparently incompatible domains. The rivalry between town and country, which has for so long paralyzed the land, is also, and above all, an urban concept. Like the preceding one, it appears with the evidence of a figure inscribed on a background.

After having served as basis for a moral judgment, it has established a political order and ultimately expressed an economic divide. Already for Virgil, and in the Bible before him, the country as refuge spread itself out before the corrupted city. The humanists and then the romantics each took a turn at this rhetorical device, the latter with more conviction than the former for they had lived through the birth of the *agglomerations*. The very persistence of this cliché, moreover, could be interpreted as a sign that humanity had not yet recovered from the shock of urbanization when it suffered the shock of industry. But until the end of the *Ancien Régime*, the city dominated the country because it concentrated in itself all the powers and dictated the law; whatever the type of government, the city within its walls imposed in fact its will on the countryside which fed it, without exception. Subjection then continued, only the nature of it changed: the city grew, was enflamed, invented, fomented, created, planned, transformed, produced, exchanged, exploded and spread; while the peasant rhythms, with their customs and their methods, persisted with the apparent permanence of long duration. Not for much longer, however, for this period soon came to an end. The dynamism of urban operations succeeded in contaminating the rural counterpart, and the divergent mentalities found themselves drawn closer. Rural areas, then, remained in the 19th century "the place for executing decisions made within the urban area" (Franco Farinelli).

The peasantry's existence was never recognized in the imagery of the countryside as Arcadia. But, paradoxically, the peasantry had an almost identical conception of the urban world, which was consequently just as fictional, for it conceived the city as a place of perpetual leisure. And just as it hardly had a voice and

was unable to make itself heard regarding its own condition, so too the man in the street continued to perceive the countryside as the verdant solitude to which he aspired. If the opposition between urban and rural is now being overcome, it is less because of a new territorial concept (which only occurs in a second phase) than it is because of the extension of urbanism to the entire territory.

Not only has the number of regions of concentrated population grown disproportionately since World War II, but, all over Western Europe at least, mentalities foreign to the city are undergoing a decisive metamorphosis which is already terminated in the United States. The operation takes place through the mass-media; even more rapidly than the railroads of the last century, the radio and particularly television have succeeded in modifying behavior by offering a kind of homogenization of lifestyles by setting up cultural reflexes.

Considered from this anthropological angle, the town-country rivalry ceases, for the city has won out. From now on, urbanized space is less one where buildings line up in tight ranks than one whose inhabitants have taken on an urban frame of mind. This identification of land with the city was already expressed by the Gallic poet Rutilius Numatianus in the fifth century when he said of Rome, "*urbem fecisti quod prius orbis erat*" (you made a city out of what was once the world). The ideal of universal citizenship, however, has been replaced by a scale of values based on utilitarianism and ideological unawareness whose long-term consequences give reason for concern.

We can deplore the conquest of the land by the city using extremely judicious arguments, we can encourage whatever might be in opposition to this movement, we can cite all kinds of contrary examples, but we cannot deny the trend nor the increasing power of its effects. Some perceived the phenomenon very early. In a letter of 1763, Rousseau wrote that "All of Switzerland is like a large city divided into thirteen areas, some of which are in the valleys, others on the hillsides and still others in the mountains. (...) There are areas which are more or less populous, but all are sufficiently inhabited to denote that we are still in the city. (...) We no longer feel we are in the wilderness when we find church steeples among the

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pine trees, flocks of sheep on the mountain rocks, factories at the bottom of the precipices and workshops built over the torrents." At a time when travelers were discovering this country after having read Haller's poem on *The Alps*, the paragon of the rural Eden, this passage and a corresponding one in the *Réveries* take on a prophetic character.

What two centuries ago may have been taken for poetic extrapolation has become reality before our eyes. The construction of superhighway networks, new railway and aviation infrastructures, systematic development of the hillside areas most favorable to summer tourism and of mountainous regions unfit for agriculture or for dwellings for the winter trade are all the most visible signs of an essentially urban activity whose goal consists in placing the continents at the disposition of city people. Moreover, if only a minute percentage of the population were to tend to food-producing plants, it would be sufficient to feed the entire global population. Under these conditions, there is no doubt that the land, no matter how vague its definition might be, can no longer serve as the unit of measurement for human phenomena.

## II

The land is not a given commodity; it results from various *processes*. On the one hand there is spontaneous transformation: the advance or retreat of forests and the ice cover, the extension of swamp land or its drying up, the filling in of lakes and the formation of river deltas, the erosion of shorelines and sea cliffs, the appearance of offshore reefs and lagoons, the subsidence of valleys, shifting terrain, volcanic eruption and subsequent cooling, earthquakes—all this bears witness to the instability of terrestrial morphology. On the other hand, there is also human activity: irrigation, construction of roads, bridges and dikes, erection of hydroelectric dams, digging canals, hollowing out of tunnels, terracing, land clearing and reforestation, land improvement and even everyday agricultural activity turn land into an unceasingly remodeled space.

The determinisms which transform it by following their own

logic (i.e. those which derive from geology and from meteorology) are assimilated into natural initiatives whereas wilful acts which aim at modifying it are additionally capable of correcting at least partially the consequences of their own activity. But most movements affecting it—including climate modifications—extend over such a time spread that they escape the notice of individuals, or even of generations, and from this comes the immutable character normally connoted by “nature.”

The inhabitants of a land tirelessly erase and rewrite the ancient scrawls of the soil. As a result of the systematic exploitation of the land, which the technological revolution of the 19th century has pushed into its furthest reaches, all regions have little by little been placed under increasing control. Even the highest mountain ranges, which the Middle Ages thought to be a sort of earthly hell, have been colonized, thanks to efficient industrial machinery. In certain Alpine zones the trails are so well marked that it is no longer possible to be lost, which reduces the fantastic dimension of these once fearful regions.

But as this list of operations indicates, it is not enough simply to declare that the land is a result of a series of more or less coordinated processes. It cannot be simply broken down into a certain number of dynamic phenomena of a geo-climatic type. As soon as a group of people occupy it (either in a light manner, by gathering, or heavily, by extraction mining), they establish a kind of developmental or planning relation with it, and the reciprocal effects of this coexistence can be observed. In other words, the land becomes the object of construction. It is a type of artifact. From then on it becomes a *product* as well.

The goals and means of this use of the land suppose in turn coherence and continuity in the social group which decides and executes the exploitation selected. For the portion of the earth's surface which can be called land is generally the object of a relation of appropriation which is not solely physical in nature, but which involves a variety of mythological or political intentions as well. This circumstance, which forbids the definition of a land by a single criterion (e.g. geographic, that of the famous “natural boundaries;” or ethnic, in terms of the resident or even the majority or simply the dominant population), indi-

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cates that the motion is not “objective.” Such a declaration would in no way signify that the concept was arbitrary, but only that it involves a considerable number of factors whose importance varies from case to case and which have generally been combined, and even consecrated, by history.

History, particularly recent history, has unfortunately created a wealth of incomplete lands the definition of which has brought on tensions since their definition does not meet the expectations of the ethnic groups involved. In a small number of particularly tragic cases, we can still see cases of “double exposure” (in the photographic sense of the term): the same geographical area is claimed by two incompatible groups, working on two contradictory projects, like the Romans and the Germans confronting each other on the Rhenish *limes*.

If the territorial entity is to be perceived as such, it is necessary that the properties assigned to it be admitted by those concerned. The dynamism of the phenomena of formation and production is continued in the idea of a continuous perfecting of the results until everything is combined: more efficient grasp of what is possible, more judicious distribution of goods and services, more adequate management, innovation in institutions. Consequently the land is a *project*.

This necessity for a collective relation to be experienced between a topographic surface and a population established in its folds permits drawing the conclusion that there is no land without imagining a land. A land can be expressed in statistical terms (expanse, altitude, average temperatures, gross production, etc.), but it cannot be reduced to the quantitative. As a project the land is semanticized. It can be parsed. It bears a name. Projections of all kinds are attached to it, transforming it into a subject.

In traditional civilizations, concerned not to disturb the order of the world and even desirous of helping to maintain it, the land is a living body of divine nature to whom cultic homage is paid. Some portions of it may benefit from a special status which consecrates them. In late antiquity a female bust crowned with towers was the symbol of Trier or Milan. The Middle Ages, and then the Baroque era, applied other means of personification, based on the symbolic interpretation of earthly



contours, finding a character who corresponded to their shapes and thereby expressed the nature of the land so represented. This moralizing desire permitted identifying the earth to Christ (Erbstorf mappemonde, 13th c.), calling Europe androgynous with Spain the head and Venice the sex (maps of Opicinus of Canistris, 14th c.) or showing the Spanish Netherlands as a lion and the Tyrol under the form of an eagle (17th c.).

The loss of meaning which accompanied the advent of industrial civilization transformed these allegories into caricature, making one country in the 19th century take on the appearance of an ogre and another that of an old maid. The personification of the land was prior to the concept of the nation as an organic unit and sometimes even took its place. When such personification lost its effect, modern states invented the idea of the fatherland and, with the help of chauvinism, succeeded in making it take hold even if at the beginning it seemed harmless.

These various translations of land into figures refer to an undeniable reality: the land has a *form*. Better still, it *is* a form, which obviously need not necessarily be geometric.

We have referred to Rome several times. The grid pattern which it imposed physically on all its conquered lands provides an extreme example of wilful configuration still visible today from Scotland to Syria, from Roumania to Portugal and from Tunisia to Germany. The square of 2400 *passus* (app. 710 m) constitutes the uniform basis of its system of agricultural operations in variously oriented networks. This basic grid is in turn articulated in multiples and sub-multiples making it possible to master both the largest dimensions (an entire province) as well as the smallest (1 *actus*, less than a quarter hectare). On a completely different scale, not directly perceptible, modern France, expressed by a hexagon, represents allegorically the closed and perfect character proper to an equilibrium acquired after centuries of trials.

Between these two regularized forms of land—the one by its boundaries, the other in its soul—can be found a multitude of intermediate solutions. The 1000 km<sup>2</sup> area created in the ninth century around Angkor is one of the most striking: temples, cities of lake dwellings and rice paddies are here united without dissolving functional continuity, the whole oriented by astronomy,



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structured by giant quadrants clustered around sanctuaries, platforms, gigantic pools, moats, dikes, paths. But alongside this "rice factory" (Henri Stierlin) we can also cite the interminable succession of *rangs* in Quebec, narrow strips of land perpendicular to the river, laid out as if by a ruler (where sometimes the ruler slipped disturbing the regularity) or the squares, circles and stripes which form the entire surface of Nebraska, a state dedicated completely to industrial agriculture.

Landscapes redesigned for production purposes but without geometric consequences are even more numerous than the preceding ones. Tenth and eleventh century Benedictines were drainage specialists who transformed the Po River plain from the swamp which it had been into tillable land. Another monastic community, the Cistercians, developed fisheries and vineyards as well as reshaping entire regions beginning in the 12th century, for example the Lavaux vineyard in French-speaking Switzerland where they constructed terraces on extremely steep slopes. The extraordinary terraced rice fields in Indonesia and the Philippines, and the elaborately embroidered plots of Kyou-Shou represent a similar kind of transformation, however on an even greater scale for they involve entire mountains.

Other interventions have also affected the form of the land without modifying the topography of production. There are those, for example, which changed the forest cover of a country (by replacing oaks with pines which grow much more rapidly, as is the case for a part of central Europe) or those which did away with forests all together (as in Spain in the Golden Age which needed wood for its navy and to produce iron and which then completely did in the land by leaving it to sheep). The discovery of America shifted European economy from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. To avoid bankruptcy, Venice, which lived from trade with the Orient, attempted to convert from long distance commerce to agriculture. Partially concluded, the operation in the 16th century brought on a profound change in the extent of tillable land, the types of plants grown and the methods used for exploiting the *terraferma* which in consequence changed the appearance of the land.

This same discovery permitted progressively importing into Europe an enormous amount of food plants or decorative species,

so well acclimatized today that they seem to have been growing there from all eternity. These also contribute to the definition of the land, or at least to its perceptible content.

The sensibility to territorial form as object of direct perception is not a recent phenomenon. If antiquity hardly knew anything other than the idealized landscape in the opposites *locus amoenus* and *locus horridus*, it seems that the Tuscan Renaissance sought to reconcile the necessities of production and the “beautiful landscape.” While it was inventing the landscape as an independent pictorial genre, it was developing parallel to this models for the shaping of land which were not limited to the geometric garden, the microcosm expressing a socio-cosmological design, but was extended topographically to affirm an achieved harmony.

For quite different reasons (and we begin to understand that economic advantages played a major role in its success), 18th century England developed an original solution—the Anglo-Chinese garden. Its size should give the illusion of a celestial expanse going on forever. Based on the contrast between grassy carpets and shady groves as well as play among the volumes of the trees and their colors to be enjoyed by following quite elaborate pathways, it was instantly admired for its freedom although it was calculated down to its last leaf. Horace Walpole said of one of the creators of this aesthetics of the picturesque, William Kent, that he “was the first to break down the barrier and discover that all of Nature is a garden.”

An erroneous explanation it was, however, since the English garden does not reflect an imitation of the countryside. If we must find its sources, they are more likely to be located in French paintings of the 17th century or those of Venice from a hundred years earlier, as some have maintained. In any case it resulted from a manipulation and an assembly in space of a certain number of selected natural products for the purpose of stirring up a variety of effects of a philosophical nature in the cultured person who entered it. In reality, it was the garden itself which broke down the barriers in the following century and which spread its landscapery to the whole British countryside. In England, the aestheticization of nature covered over and legitimized a radical transformation of production relations as a

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result of a new distribution of landed property. The shape of the land began to express more precisely the socio-economic realities of nascent liberalism.

### III

Among the possible relations to the shape of the land, the last centuries of the *Ancien Régime* developed two which were favored by contemporaries of the industrial revolution: the map and the natural landscape as object of contemplation. The two phenomena are opposed in terms of their ends and their means because they correspond to fundamentally differing ideas of nature.

The first underlay the development of the sciences which consider "Nature" as a common good available to humanity which men can, and even must, exploit for their own profit—in other words, as an object. This tendency reached its zenith with 19th century Positivism, the technological revolution giving it an irresistible boost. The second, on the other hand, considered that same nature as a sort of pedagogue of the human soul, to the point that Romanticism, the Germanic kind particularly, conceived of it as a mystic being which carried on an unending dialogue with men—in other words, as a subject. The hypertrophy of Reason was matched by a hypertrophy of Sentiment. Those who worked to instrumentalize science with the goal of achieving even more effective control over the land were opposed by those who sought to create an intersubjective relationship with nature.

Antiquity had maps rather comparable to our own, as can be seen in the "Peutinger Table," a late Empire itinerary which has come down to us in the form of a copy. It worked out the cadastres on stone slabs; such instruments, miniature forms of a given land area, were necessary to manage the Romanized world. The basic idea of a map is the simultaneous view of a territory the immediate perception of which is impossible by definition. A reduction of the real in its dimensions and in its components, a map still retains the original relations of the elements included. To a large degree, it takes the place of land, for the operations conceived for the latter are planned

on the former. Map and land theoretically can be interchanged at any moment, but it is obvious that this is in fact a dangerous illusion since such convertibility does not take into account the fact that the identity of the two objects is only postulated, nor the fact of scale or rate of reduction which has less to do with the size of the map than with the very essence of the phenomena which it denotes and whose real dimensions remain determinant.

Medieval romances make it clearly felt that a mental representation of the land is essential for understanding it, as do certain political debates from the same period. In 1229 the Doge, Pietro Ziani, proposed to transfer Venice to Byzantium. Even supposing that such a transfer were possible, the several tens of thousands of Venetians would have been completely lost inside the walls of Constantinople. Because of a lack of graphic reductions of the two cities, it was necessary to rely on extremely approximate memories and calculations. The evaluation of distances was equally vague. The proposition was seriously discussed, but the councils preferred to adopt the converse operation and consider that from now on Byzantium was in Venice. With its slightly surrealist content, this episode puts a finger on the material conditions in which power was exercised until the 16th century at least, incapable as it was of measuring precisely the terms of a geo-political problem because of a lack of instruments.

In the same way in the romances of the Arthurian cycle, Perceval roams a countryside in which he constantly finds himself lost, where cities and castles appear or disappear, above all for the modern reader, because the paths connecting them were not identified. What we think of as poetic invention describes the everyday reality of traveling. It was necessary to ask directions constantly, like ants, each inquiring of all the others. And this lack of representation explains, we believe, the excesses of the Crusades, as well as the vagabond isles which fill the tales of the 18th century.

This undefined territory could not meet the needs of a modern state. It was thus important to represent it completely, exactly and unitarily all at the same time. A triangulation system, a projection method, a catalogue of signs were devised little by little to reach levels of flexibility and of precision which are

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literally fabulous. The scientific cartography of the Cassini, perfected during the course of the 18th century, everywhere took the place of the empirical methods of data collected for fiscal purposes, at that time the common practice all over Europe. The national basis for its geodesic network authorized a systematic coordination of sectorial data, organized into a flawless logical system.

This "geometric description of France" was planned on 180 sheets at 1/84 400th. It was to be unrestricted and there was to be no unrepresented surface except for the Alps; it met with unanticipated problems which underscore the ambiguity of such an undertaking. In fact, what is striking in these incomparable documents is the mixture of conventional and realistic notations as well as the inconsistent blank spaces which stand out so strikingly in comparison. There are various kinds of hatchings to indicate slopes and hillsides and groups of symbols proper to swamps and forests, but no distinctions are made within these sectors and levels are merely alluded to. In the plains there is no indication of crops, and roads are not given at all. Isolated constructions are designated by a church façade, a farm or a windmill seen in reduced elevation, and these are the exceptions to the perpendicular principle of the overview. Relief representation was not satisfactorily codified until the 19th century, either by a system of measured hatchings or that of level curves.

No doubt engineers were groping for a kind of territorial facsimile. Their every effort tended toward a realistic effect that the most recent physical maps achieve in a sometimes striking manner, to the point that some of these seem at first glance to be scale models. This hyperrealism is nevertheless incapable of changing either the nature of the land or that of the map. For the land contains much more than the map wants to show, while the map remains, despite everything, an abstraction. It lacks that which is most characteristic of the land: its breadth, its thickness and its perpetual change. This is a paradoxical status, for it aims to be exhaustive and, nevertheless, it must choose. A map is a filter. It disregards the seasons, takes no note of the conflicts which weaken every society, does not consider the myths or the experiences, even the collective ones,

which bind a people to the physical setting of their activities. Or, if it attempts to do so by statistical cartography, it expresses it with still other abstractions, for it is poorly equipped qualitatively. It can do nothing but generalize.

To represent the land means to understand it. But such representation is not a tracing but always a creation. A map is drawn first to know and then to act. It has in common with the land the fact of being a process, a product, a project. And since it is also form and meaning, there is a danger that it be taken for a subject. Created as a model, with the fascination of a microcosm, an extremely malleable simplification, it tends to substitute itself for reality. The map is purer than the land, for it obeys the prince. It is open to every design which it concretizes by anticipation and whose correctness it seems to prove. This sort of *trompe l'oeil* not only visualizes the actual territory to which it refers, it can incarnate things which are not. It can show non-existent land just as seriously as an actual one, which shows that it is better to be prudent. It is constantly in danger of dissimulating what it is supposed to be making clear. How many regimes hoping to be effective think they lead a country when in fact they only govern a map?

This facility for slipping into fiction made geography, of all the disciplines which developed in the 19th century, the one perhaps least devoid of ideology. Profoundly utilitarian or even militarist in its orientation, it produced admirable works, few of which are innocent. It began by describing with a concern for exactness. Much later it heard the call of a philosopher who urged his colleagues not only to interpret the world, but to transform it. A new kind of map was born, that of the planners, which anticipates changes by prescribing them. "The land no longer has precedence over the map, nor survives it; from now on the map has precedence over the land" (Jean Baudrillard). This map projected into the future became indispensable for mastering complex development phenomena on a large scale, but it acquired the intoxicating characteristics of a working drawing. By consciously detaching itself from reality, it has similitude for a limit, which will sanction its vanity. At this point it is difficult not to observe that at the beginning of the book held sacred by Westerners, there is a precept which they



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have followed only too well: "Go forth and dominate the earth!," and not go live in symbiosis with it.

The map can thus be seen to be a demiurgic instrument; it restores the vertical viewpoint of the gods as well as their ubiquity. The landscape, on the other hand, is visible to man, who can only be in one place at a time, in a horizontal manner, just as man can only see the world successively. In the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and Alembert, landscape was still only a pictorial genre. It did not become a complex of geo-tectonic forms perceived in real space until the beginning of the 19th century. The reasons for this attention to the morphology of the land derive in part from the ideology of the will which incites equally Faust and Marx as well as the great bourgeois Alexander von Humboldt. An entire school of followers of the Enlightenment devoted itself to analyzing the new object as reality independent of the observer and as temporary result of a certain number of concurrent forces. Conceived in an ecological perspective before the fact, formative geography turned landscape into the context of human history. Although aiming as ultimate goal at the domination of nature, it was still impregnated with the notion of the harmony of the cosmos which survived up until the 20th century in descriptions-syntheses where science and literature cannot be distinguished.

But it is not this literary elaboration of the landscape which is of interest to us here, for that always presumes an observer who is mobile, informed, determined, familiar with the map. The purely receptive use of the landscape, which is not at all concerned with explaining anything that was, belongs to another world. For the person who is determined to perceive intensely the passage of the seasons, the manifestations of light and the glory of the colors, for such a person mountains, rivers, trees and clouds form the elements of a metaphysical message to be deciphered not without reverential awe. It would seem that this landscape become "spiritual mood" (Amiel) is an incarnation of the sacred force which flowed into religions drained after the French Revolution. It favors an individual and cosmic relation located well beyond spectacle for it seeks to create a subject-to-subject bond with "Nature." This refusal to reify the land is the very antithesis of the cartographic attitude.



Such a perception of the landscape cannot be reduced to what is visible. Nor is it hedonist like a stroll through a garden with surprises prepared for sensory and intellectual stimulation. It involves the entire being in a phenomenal projection, for it aspires to an unceasingly deferred elsewhere. It is evident that this attitude is incompatible with a positive view of the landscape, a view attached simply to the extension of phenomena. What is less evident is that, through the exaltation of its poetry, its visionary canvases and its program sonatas, it contributes decisively to the development of a taste for raw landscape. But this taste quickly degenerates into a variety of simplifications, each of which can be reconciled with predatory land management. In place of an awe-filled contemplation of furious oceans, the heroism of glaciers and peaks, now there are the exploits of sport sailing and the Alpine Club for whom the summit is earned by effort. After the sublime, the picnic.

This gymnastic approach at least has the advantage of not limiting the perception of the land to the optical view of it that one might have. For the landscape vogue has also led to an aestheticization of the earthly cover under the impulse of an initially English tourism. Great numbers of landowners began to travel, no longer like their aristocratic predecessors on the Grand Tour who hoped to acquire culture, but in order to experience sensations. These new dilettantes designated what was to be admired, and their choice is still our own apart from a few exceptions. Their presence necessitated hotels, cog railways and steam boats, material which still shapes the transportation structure of entire regions.

In this late phase, an aesthetic institution was generalized which permits *landscaping* the world at small expense: the belvedere. It creates a fixed relation between a given point of land and all those other points which can be seen from it. The belvedere transforms the landscape into a shape, freezes it into a cliché, socializes it in banality, in short makes it invisible, for all that was just said means that it conforms to its reproduction. Centrifuge, the belvedere is the opposite of a place. But it is also very centripetal, for the democratic bourgeois, presenting himself to nature spread out at his feet, there receives its homage, as does the sovereign from the heights of the royal

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pavilion. The farther the view carries and the more panoramic it is, the more it satisfies the need to dominate by derisively opposing the individual to the planet's mass.

This craving for real landscape was accompanied by the development of the painted landscape which culminated in the Impressionist school. The Romantic landscape filled with pathos was replaced by a phenomenological landscape. Its success brought on an education of the manner of viewing that was much more refined. Consequently it was painting that stimulated the landscape, for it had succeeded in transfiguring certain topographic accidents into absolute shapes. The profile of Mont Sainte-Victoire will always be a Cézanne construction, an undertaking anticipated by Hokusai with Fuji-Yama. But it also made urban man sensitive to phenomena which had been imperceptible before. The city dweller who had experienced his rural or mountainous environs as given now began to perceive them throughout the year as the seasons offered them to him, sometimes distant, sometimes too near or too faded, changing in color and texture. The agrarian landscapes which man had created over the centuries now became works of art and were sometimes protected as such. It also happens that knowledge acquired by learned research underwent fantastic extrapolation. Viollet-le-Duc, after having described the morphology of Mont Blanc, even went so far as to give views of its conjectured shape prior to erosion. Bruno Taut went even further by proposing that the Alpine summits be cut into the shape of gigantic crystals, a lyrical project whose enormous price he emphasized, "but still less than the cost of a war."

Despite their diversity, the Impressionist thrust, the organization of open-air sports and the landscape as spectacle or as spiritual experience are, once more, urban products which correspond to industrialization and to overgrown cities. These reactions are often nostalgic or ambiguous. We went into the high mountains in search of a perfectly mythical, virginal nature; the creation of national parks and natural preserves is the technician's answer to the same desire, but if it means that the rest of the land can be destroyed, then it is no more than a cynical alibi. Buckminster Fuller's Utopian idea of covering Manhattan with a plastic dome in order to control its climate

totally is countered by the ideas of the radical ecologists who dream of a world reconquered by the primaeval forest. Both are children of the 18th century and tend toward the same retrospective ends of reinstalling Paradise on earth. And so is travel advertising which offers the perpetual good weather of archetypical countries where traveling's essential characteristic is carefully avoided: that of coming back different.

#### IV

The landscape at which I am looking disappears if I close my eyes; and the one you see differs from the one I see, even though we have the same point of view. If I identify on a map shapes whose contrast or harmony is attractive, if I note the surfaces, the masses and the spots which constitute it symphonically, I only obtain inarticulated lines and stripes. "Landscape as unity exists only in my consciousness" (Raymond Bloch). It is not a sculpture, deriving from an act of organizing spaces and volumes and presented as such, but a fortuitous collection of topographical fragments telescoped together, where distances are abolished, where I assign meaning because I provide it with the dignity of a formal system and because I treat it, in short, as the equal of a work of art.

What counts in landscape is less its "objectivity" (which distinguishes it from a phantasm) than the *value attributed to its configuration*. This value is and can only be cultural. The projections with which I enrich it, the analogies which I spontaneously apply to it are an integral part of my perception. This is why your landscapes and mine, although identical, do not overlap. If this reasoning is extended through history, it becomes much clearer. Faced with a given landscape—the plain of the Beauce, the Matterhorn seen from Zermatt, Palermo approached from the sea—there is no doubt that Theocritus, Gregory VII, Palladio and Schubert would, from the same point of view, perceive incomparably different landscapes. For each of them, the field of perception and even its orientation would vary profoundly. And if animals were included in the experiment, the result would be even more evident. Obviously my dog perceives this

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mountain or that lake, but it is insensitive to *landscape*, a connection which I create (by thinking that I recognize it) between natural forms. And even if I forced myself to record only “shapes and colors assembled in a certain order,” I am still obeying a given cultural command.

But the opposition of map and landscape is no longer true since we too have acquired the viewpoint of the gods. Satellites transmit pictures of the planet non-stop, section by section. For the technological revolution, still a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of humanity, has given us properties which theology once attributed to supernatural beings, so far out of our reach did they seem. Bilocation is now possible to whoever wants it.

Traditional religions distinguished between sacred time and space and profane time and space. Western society has lost the notion of the sacred—apart from individual experiences—but we can still conceive of time differently when we travel. Our biological clock resists the spatio-temporal contraction imposed by long distance air travel: the sensitive person who lands *in a completely different place* perceives the difference magically. More modestly, the superhighways offer the occasion for an analogous experience, particularly those which cross great mountainous regions. The present which reigns in the vehicle is related to very distant points located in a network whose scale has nothing in common with that of the region being traveled.

On the one hand there is local life, dominated by the weighty rhythm of the annual cycles, hanging from tiresome slopes and frequently capable only of archaic techniques of exploiting the land with almanac computations and conjurations. This life goes on at walking speed. On the other hand, there is the arrow-swath which smoothly transforms these rugged walls, these torrents, these forests into a sort of anamorphosis for a phantom train. Heavy interventionist policies have created a multi-tiered land, not only because of the material superposition of these networks, but also by the differentiated systems of relation which they have instituted. Such a juxtaposition determining two unconnected realities and the scarcity of superhighway exits and rest areas emphasize it all the more. It can

be countered that the train already offered the same experience; but this is not true for the same rails serve both local and international traffic, blurring the distinction.

Small aircraft, and particularly the helicopter, provide an even more *divine* relation to the land than the automobile. It is impossible to describe, it resembles a map or a scale model, and it partakes of the immediacy of the land in a performance which elevates it above that of the cartographers described by Borgès: their map was of the same scale as the land which was consequently completely covered by it. The helicopter continually varies the scale and thus modifies the status of the one who is flying it: all limitations are removed, the most fabulous dream is realized. Freedom of movement allied with speed also possesses such a hallucinatory character that it is possible to ask if, for many of our contemporaries, it does not take the place of freedom in general inasmuch as it has become its symbol.

Its meanderings detached from the paths so patiently inscribed in the earth, its ability to tear itself away from one place and to melt into another make of the helicopter the most casual of our analytical instruments. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the oxcart and raft, the automobile is not far behind. It is necessary to understand that these new instruments themselves create an unseen land where the imaginary and the real can be mutually verified. This land is no longer made up in the first place of wide expanses and obstacles, but by flow, trunk roads and intersections.

Until the dawn of the seventies, this ideology of movement and transformation controlled the mentality of planners. Everything seemed to occur as if the land had no permanence. Various cries of alarm rang out to question growth because wasting of resources leads to disaster. Independently, historical research into human establishments began to be interested in new themes. Cities, which until then had been dealt with according to the stages of their formation and the designs for their development, became the object of much more refined analyses of their substance. Researchers from the field of architecture ambitiously attempted to elucidate the complex relation which unites plots of land and the typology of the dwellings constructed on them, the relation of these two components to the road system and the

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laws for their transformation. New micro-analyses have encouraged historians trained on the spot to re-examine ancient cadastral maps and to take up the study of entire regions in new terms. The patient unraveling of the relation between roads, plots and their geological substratum was also frequently included as well as the interpretation of incomplete former projects. From this came a totally reoriented reading of the land which seeks to identify the traces still present of lost territorial processes, such as soil formation, particularly alluvial soil on which human establishments have been created.

Some planners also began to be concerned with these traces for designing their own operations. After two centuries during which land management had known no other formula than that of the *tabula rasa*, a development concept was designed which no longer considered the land as a quasi-abstract field of operation, but as the result of a very lengthy and very slow stratification which should be understood before acting.

In this way the land regained its long term dimension, even if retrospectively. This new mentality restored to it a depth which had been forgotten. Here can still be found the remains of a geological catastrophe which permanently modified a certain valley or created a certain body of water. There, aerial archaeology detects buried landscapes revealing a different use of the soil. There exist pieces of a road system whose amplitude and arrangement we can only surmise. And traumatic events can also be perceived, several generations later, in a positive manner. A certain artificial lake, violently opposed as a foreign intrusion when its dam was constructed, now is defended as an integral and indispensable element by the descendants of its adversaries.

Such an attentive study of vestiges and transformations is in no way a sign of fetishism in their regard. It is not a matter of surrounding them with a wall in order to give them an unsailable dignity, but only to use them as elements, as reference points, as accents, as stimulants for our own planning. A "place" is not a given, but the result of condensing. In countries where man has been present for generations, *a fortiori* for millennia, all territorial accidents are significant. To understand them is to give oneself the chance of making a more intelligent intervention.



But the archaeological concept of stratification does not yet provide the most appropriate metaphor for describing the phenomenon of accumulation. Most layers are both very thin and filled with lacunae. In particular, man does not simply add to these layers, he also erases them. Certain strata were wilfully done away with. After Nero's *damnatio memoriae*, the Roman centuriate at Orange was so totally eradicated and replaced by another one, oriented differently, that nothing of the former remains. Other vestigial layers have been obliterated by being worn down. It may be that only the most recent developments continue to exist.

The land, so heavily charged with traces and with past readings, seems very similar to a palimpsest. To set up new developments, to exploit more rationally certain lands, it is often necessary to modify their substance in an irreversible manner. But the land is not a throw-away wrapper or a consumer product which can be replaced. Every land is unique, whence the need to "recycle," to scrape clean once more (if possible with the greatest care) the ancient text where men have written across the irreplaceable surface of the soil, in order to make it available again so that it meets today's needs before being done away with in its turn. Some regions, because of too brutal treatment and improper action, also have holes, like a parchment too often erased. In the jargon of geography, these holes are called deserts.

Such considerations bring us back to our initial point of departure. In the perspective which we have just outlined, it is in fact evident that the foundation for planning can no longer be the city, but that territorial reserve to which it must be subordinated. It is equally true that development can no longer consider only quantities, but it must acquire an additional dimension by integrating the shape of the land into its design.

Map or direct view of the "landscape," fervently brief meditation or analysis for an intended intervention, the subject-object relationship will always be partial and intermittent, which is to say open. The land stretches out *over there*, always different from what I know of it, what I perceive of it, what I want of it. Its double appearance as a context marked by man and as a place of special psychic relation allows supposing that "Nature,"



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in the West always considered to be an external and independent force, should instead be defined as the field for our imagination. This does not mean that it is at last domesticated, but more simply that, in each civilization, *nature is that which the culture designates to be such*. It goes without saying that this definition is applied to human nature as well.

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