

# The Meanings of Landscape: Historical Development, Cultural Frames, Linguistic Variation, and Antonyms

Werner Bigell

University of Tromsø

Cheng Chang

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

## Abstract



The article presents the shifts of meaning of the term landscape in English and other Germanic languages, from territory to vista and social arena. The concept of landscape forms part of a cultural frame of reference, and changes in the cultural context also affect the meaning of landscape. The dependency of the meaning of landscape on context is shown in an overview of what landscape means in other languages: Spanish, Russian, Thai, Arabic, and Chinese. The different meanings of landscape can also be elucidated by identifying its antonyms, the anti-landscape and the non-landscape. Although commonly criticized in the academic field as being deterministic, early attempts to map the influence of landscape on culture should be re-evaluated in the current trend to understand landscape systemically.

*Keywords:* platial and spatial landscape, anti-landscape, non-landscape, Ratzel, Sarmiento, Olwig.

## Resumen

El artículo presenta los cambios de significado del término paisaje en inglés y en otros idiomas germánicos, desde territorio a vista panorámica y área social. El paisaje forma parte de un marco cultural de referencia, y los cambios en el contexto cultural también afectan el significado del paisaje. La dependencia del significado del paisaje del contexto cultural se muestra en un resumen de lo que el paisaje significa en otros idiomas: español, ruso, tailandés, árabe y chino. Los diferentes significados del paisaje también pueden ser dilucidados mediante la identificación de los antónimos de paisaje, el anti-paisaje y el no-paisaje. Aunque rechazados generalmente en el campo académico como deterministas, los intentos anteriores de analizar la influencia del paisaje en la cultura pueden ser revalorizados en la tendencia actual de entender el paisaje de forma sistémica.

*Palabras clave:* paisaje espacial y situado, anti-paisaje, no paisaje, Ratzel, Sarmiento, Olwig.

## Introduction

Since the natural and created environments in which people live form part of their cultural frame of reference, it is often not easy to translate terms that describe these environments. The grim meaning of the biblical desert, for example, resonates with neither the tourist's curious gaze nor the inhabitant of a desert city. The role that

the forest plays for German national identity is lost on a Norwegian, for whom mountains and high plains (*fjell og vidde*) have an analogous function. Abstract terms, such as nature, also have a perplexing variety of meaning. Nature may refer to principles governing the material world, to the material world (including humanity), to the world outside human creation, as well as to life and ecosystems. Activities in the environment, such as the Norwegian term *friluftsliv* (literally, “free air life”), also pose problems for translators. The common translation “outdoor recreation” signifies outdoor activities in English. Although *friluftsliv* is an activity, it is based on a Norwegian philosophical tradition. It is linked to national identity and forms an integral part of the educational system. Its meaning therefore exceeds activity. Even apparently universal terms, such as walking, refer to activities that show considerable cultural variation.

While the term nature has experienced a narrowing of meaning, from existence to life, the term landscape has widened its meaning from being a view or setting to being an arena where humans interact with the natural world. Like *friluftsliv*, landscape is associated with nation building. Like walking, it appears to be universal but shows considerable cultural and linguistic variation. The common denominator of landscape meanings, whether as a view or a social arena, is that landscape is limited, either by the horizon when we speak visually or by boundaries when we speak of social arenas. This limitation is useful because it allows a community to relate to it; the “we” in landscape is that of a specific community and not that of humanity in general. Landscapes are created by community interaction with the natural world. Yet are communities and societies also creations of landscape? An affirmative answer to this question was commonplace in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, it has been deemed to be obsolete in an academic climate in which social construction is highlighted and determinism is an invective.

Whose landscape is it, from where is it seen, and for what purpose? Kenneth Olwig distinguishes between, on the one hand, a spatial landscape that is seen as a part of a larger (e.g., national) space from a single vantage point by an outside observer and, on the other hand, a place-oriented landscape (i.e., the territory of a community) seen from the inside, with a multitude of perspectives on the other. The basic meaning of landscape, as a limited section of the territory of our planet, can be seen from different real and metaphorical vantage points, creating a variety of frames, including political, historical, spiritual, or geological ones. Such a variety of frames and perspectives means that the term has the potential to shift meaning; it also means that it can develop antonyms, such as anti-landscape and non-landscape.

## **Landscape and environment**

The aim of this article is to explore the potential of the term landscape, showing how it functions in cultural discourses and adapts to historical frames. In the fields of ecocriticism and environmental humanities, landscape has remained in the shadow of the terms nature and environment. While the concept of nature is marked by human subtraction in a process of objectification, the idea of the environment aims at re-positioning humanity into the world in a predominantly ecological perspective. However, the problem with the environment is that it tends to see human beings as a

biological species, understating socio-political divisions and culturally bound aesthetics. Landscape, although this may appear as a leftover from an anthropocentric conceptualization, highlights the historical frame of perception of and interaction with the world. Lucius Burckhardt points out that “changes of nature are [...] perceived under the image of ‘landscape;’ the image of landscape as a historical construct in the heads of people determines their behaviors and their measures that are not necessarily self-regulating but have irreversible and history-generating effects” (*Landschaft* 32; translation by the author). Landscape is more than a projection unto nature or the environment: it is a multivalent frame—territorial, political, aesthetic, etc.—determining how the environment is perceived and shaped.

A caveat: A broad historical overview in combination with a comparative approach implies the danger of over-generalization. The article assumes that cultures are marked by a degree of coherence that makes generalizations possible. These generalizations must be seen as what they are, overviews, not as exhaustive and permanent truths about a culture. However, a relativist position claiming that there are no coherent cultures and there is not “the meaning” of a term such as landscape in a language conflates generalization and stereotyping and blinds research for exactly the historical, aesthetic, and territorial frames that landscape stands for—and thus it also undermines the effectiveness of narratives of resistance, replacing them with postures in the marketplace of identities. The reason why we included case studies and sketches of landscape meaning in different languages is not to present authoritative anthropological and linguistic studies about those languages; our intention is rather to show the variability and adaptability of the term landscape to cultural and historical frames and thus its potential in the discourse of the environmental humanities.

### **Relating to the material world: Projection and transformation**

Landscape refers to surface sections of our planet, but this does not necessarily mean that landscape is two-dimensional: mining areas are three-dimensional landscapes, and the growing awareness of the atmosphere creates a three-dimensional sense. The term landscape implies land but can be extended to water surfaces, as the term seascape shows. Also predominantly human environments are landscapes as the term cityscape shows. Tim Cresswell observes that, “landscape is an intensely visual idea” (10), but appreciation can involve other senses as well, creating sensory landscapes such as soundscapes or smell-scapes. The term spiritual landscape refers to the spiritual dimension of human projection, as in holy groves. Moonscape and Marscape are terms that refer to landscapes that are insignificantly altered by humans but that nevertheless form part of humanity’s imagination as new frontiers, due to the existence of images.

J.B. Jackson’s statement that the beauty of landscape stems from human presence in it begs the question about the nature of this presence. Presence is obvious in material artifacts, such as roads, fields, or hedges, but it also exists in projections onto an otherwise unchanged natural environment, as in the case of the Arctic, which is often

seen as exotic and pure. Another example in which a natural structure is infused with meaning is the desert in the Bible. Projection can lead to transformation of landscape: the Puritan vision of the Promised Land, to create a City Upon a Hill, was a projection of biblical narratives onto the New World, creating the mold for settling the frontier. When the frontier was closed and when city landscapes were forming, the ideal of combining countryside and city was a projection creating the suburban landscape.

## Landscape as territory

Understanding landscape in a visual sense means to evade the question of who uses, owns, and controls the landscape. Cresswell argues that, “in most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it” (10), and in landscape painting, human beings, if shown at all, function as scales, to highlight nature’s immensity. In his article “Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape,” Olwig aims at recuperating the insider’s perspective. Referring to the American geographer Richard Hartshorne, Olwig explains that the term in English is mainly aesthetic, referring to a singular perspective on the land from the outside, the “appearance of land as we perceive it” (Hartshorne quoted in Olwig “Recovering” 630), whereas the German term *Landschaft* is ambivalent: it either refers to the visual perspective as in English or has the territorial meaning of a “restricted piece of land” (Hartshorne quoted in Olwig “Recovering” 630). Olwig argues that this substantive and territorial understanding of landscape as “a place of human habitation and environmental interaction” ought to be recovered, and landscape should be seen as a “nexus of community, justice, nature and environmental equity, a contested territory” (“Recovering” 630).

Olwig argues that while the sense of landscape as scenery emerged at the turn of the sixteenth century, there is an older, Northern European territorial sense of the term (“Recovering” 631). Landscapes in this sense were at least partially independent political units, linking the ideas of place and community (632). In modern German landscape discussions, visual and territorial senses are often confused (631). Scandinavian landscape (*landskap*) was also “a nexus of law and cultural identity” (633). Landscape in this territorial sense is associated with common land and common law (in contrast to feudal ownership and Roman law), and it encompasses town and country (634). Artistic representations of this landscape would focus not on wide views but on vernacular home environments (635). In contrast, “the Italianate tradition emphasized the timeless geometrical laws of spatial aesthetics as expressed in natural scenes that were inspired by the ideal past of classical imperial Rome” (637). Olwig calls this timeless perspective spatial and coins the term “platial” for the vernacular perspective from the inside.

Understanding the platial and spatial dimensions allows us to ask who owns, uses, and represents the land in a landscape. In the English countryside, landscape was created by the enclosure of the commons, allowing the rural gentry to remake the common land into a picturesque landscape: “Rural landscaping created the scenic image of the country community ideal, while helping to undermine the customary law upon

which it was based” (Olwig “Recovering” 640). Land turned into property, territorial autonomy was abandoned, and peasants literally had to know their place in the new order. The later process of nation building has a duplicitous effect on the understanding of landscape. On the one hand, the idea of territory is central, on the other national unity undermines local independence, as Olwig explains: “The ultimate irony, however, is perhaps the way in which the expansion of the German state resulted in the swallowing up of such ancient Germanic *Landschaften* as Dithmarschen and North Friesland and in the loss of their former independence” (643). Fascism then redefined community in landscape in biological terms: “The *Land* ceased to be an area defined by human law; it rather became the soil, *Boden*, which determined the blood of the people dwelling on the land” (643).

### *National landscapes*

While local communities form spontaneously because they are built on blood relations, personal acquaintance, and eye contact, national communities have a symbolic dimension that needs to be constructed. From the outset, national landscapes are spatial: they override regional differences, such as dialects, create a coherent economy and infrastructure, and create a mythology of landscapes; in other words, they form a singular perspective. Tom Mels discusses this through the example of Dutch landscape around 1600: “With the rise of the modern nation state, the spatialized elite landscapes of Renaissance painting and theatre (associated with a more universal ‘natural’ law and central authority) replaced the platial landscapes of customary festivities of the commoners” (714). This perspective tones down local differences and defines typical landscapes of a nation. Landscape becomes a central feature of the national imagination. Sverker Sörlin discusses scholarship in this field, mentioning John Opie’s *Nature’s Nation* and Simon Schama’s *Landscape and Memory*:

[T]his literature is a reflection of the growing insight that community, human *Gemeinschaft*, is not only a formal issue of citizenship. Rather, senses of belonging are deeply rooted in emotions, memory, and imagery: in mental categories; and landscape has played an important role in that process during the era of human history that has been fundamentally structured by the nation. (272)

The significant cultural differences in the use and perception of nature and the creation of landscapes are national differences.

At its inception the national landscape is a spatial one, created by the elite. Yet it aims at emulating a platial landscape, infusing society with elements of community. The platial character of a national landscape can be evaluated by looking at a number of factors. Do the citizens of a nation share the imaginary of the landscape? Are there excluded or invisible groups? Are people involved in landscape planning and creation? Do they use, own, and control landscape, for example in the form of city parks or national parks? This means that national landscape in a platial sense means more than a shared imagination and mythology; it means a shared real space with public ownership and control. Landscape uses can vary (for example, due to social class, age, ethnicity, gender), but still form a coherent whole, a shared imaginary and physical landscape.

### *Supranational landscapes*

In between the national and global landscape there is a supranational level, which in Europe is codified in the European Landscape Convention (ELC) by the Council of Europe. The ELC defines landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors,” and the Explanatory Report of the ELC specifies that the “public is accordingly encouraged to take an active part in landscape management and planning, and to feel it has responsibility for what happens to the landscape.” The Explanatory Report further states that the aim of landscape planning is to “meet the aspirations of the people concerned” and that the aim is not a “freezing of the landscape.” But who are the concerned people? The ELC sees its role in the “consolidation of the European identity,” but this statement must be seen in light of the political role of the Council of Europe, which “crowns” efforts on other levels:

Where local and regional authorities have the necessary competence, protection, management and planning of landscapes will be more effective if responsibility for their implementation is entrusted—within the constitutional framework legislatively laid down at national level—to the authorities closest to the communities concerned. (ELC Explanatory Report n.p.; our italics)

The ELC has a multi-level approach to landscape and sees local self-government as the main level of landscape planning. The ELC also combines different interests (“social needs, economic activity and the environment”) in its definition and makes it clear that landscape is not defined by aesthetics but by social practice: “landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognized as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas.” Unlike the UNESCO convention dealing with historic monuments, the objective of the ELC is to cover “all landscapes, even those that are not of outstanding universal value” (ELC Explanatory Report n.p.). In conclusion, the ELC has moved a long way away from an aristocratic, visual, aesthetic, and spatial understanding of landscape replacing it with a social definition, favoring a multi-level bottom-up approach, with local communities as the main actors. The supranational level of the ELC does not compete with the national and regional levels but promotes a platial understanding of landscape inside those levels throughout Europe.

### *Global landscapes*

Since landscape is defined by its distinction from other landscapes, it appears self-contradictory to speak about a global landscape. Environmentalism has brought an understanding that there are common features in landscape such as the atmosphere, the presence of life and ecosystems; Ursula Heise discusses this global, planetary, or eco-cosmopolitan sense of the environment in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*:

*The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008). This scientific global awareness is sometimes linked to a spiritual dimension; an example here is the Gaia hypothesis, which sees the planetary ecosystem as a single organism. However, global ecological awareness does not create a global landscape. Global political structures are weak, and due to the absence of such structures, in combination with extreme inequality, there is no global polity that could constitute a landscape. Invoking such a polity by speaking about human impact or interests therefore has a false ring.

There is, however, another sense in which landscapes are global, namely as part of a global system of mediated reference, as in tourism. On the one hand the Grand Canyon is part of an ecosystem and forms, as a national park, part of the American identity. It is also a globally-known and marketed location, which the tourism researcher Dean MacCannell calls a “sight.” Sights form the material component of an attraction linked to the cultural image, called marker. This means that landscapes can form part of a global repository of sights and markers, being marketed by the tourism industry. The spatial and mainly visual perspective in marketing can produce a sensation of theme-park homogeneity and inauthenticity in some tourists. Rather than linking authenticity to tourist experience, MacCannell proposes to evaluate it by the degree of local control, favoring a platial approach. Such a platial approach to global landscapes is also seen in the idea and institution of the ecomuseum, which emphasizes local control of heritage, leaving heritage items in their original place (“in situ” approach), and local involvement in landscape creation and ecosystem management.

### **The influence of landscape on culture**

Landscape is created by culture, but is culture created by landscape too? This question is contentious in the humanities today, which are under the spell of social constructivism; anything that could be interpreted as essentialism or determinism is “problematic.” The fear of determinism is not unfounded, as crude environmentalist theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century show. One of numerous examples is that of a 19<sup>th</sup> century traveler in East Africa who argues that the Savannah is monotonous and therefore leads to a culture in which nothing aspires, nothing dominates; loosely assembled communities lack political unity and civil variation” (quoted in Ratzel 66; my translation). There must be a way to account for the material influences of the environment (and its structured form, the landscape) without succumbing to a simplistic notion of determinism.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel founded the interdisciplinary field of anthropo-geography. He interpreted natural conditions as both a limit and condition for historical events (42), not in the sense of a teleological determinism but as a statistically significant influence (51). He claims that nature affects human beings, and as soon as the effects are quantitatively measurable, they become part of human history (57). The effects of nature consist of individual physiological and psychological factors; for example, effects on migration, indirect effects on the character of peoples, and effects of material conditions on a people (59). Effects depend on time

(69) and are mediated through the economic and social conditions (84). Ratzel also claims that contrary to common sense, the dependency on nature increases with development, meaning that, for instance, industrial societies are more dependent on natural conditions (resources) than less developed societies (86-87). Whereas indigenous people are subjected to the forces of nature, developed cultures gain freedom from those forces, not in the sense of a separation from nature but in the sense of a more complex and wider connection (87). Ratzel is often remembered today as an environmental determinist. However, a fresh look shows that his approach to describe environmental influences statistically and systemically is still valid.

Whereas Ratzel describes natural factors in general and deals with landscape implicitly, the Argentinean philosopher and statesman Domingo Sarmiento explores the influence of landscape on culture. In his 1845 book *Facundo: Or, Civilization and Barbarism* Sarmiento rejects racial factors for the explanation of regional cultural differences in favor of environmental ones. He criticizes the gaucho culture of the Argentinean Pampa for its backwardness and links civilization to cities: "All civilization, whether native, Spanish, or European, centres in the cities, where are to be found the manufactories, the shops, the schools and colleges, and other characteristics of civilized nations" (19). It is the spatial limitation of the city that creates the "intimate association" (22), as in the "Roman municipality, where all the population were assembled within an inclosed space, and went from it to cultivate the surrounding fields" (21). The isolation of the Pampa, on the other hand, shapes a barbaric culture, which Sarmiento calls the "spirit of the Pampa" (12):

[T]he incentive is wanting; no example is near, the inducements of making a great display which exist in a city, are not known in that isolation and solitude. [...] There is but the isolated self-concentrated feudal family. Since there is no collected society, no government is possible. [...] [The Argentinean system] differs from the nomad tribes in admitting of no social reunion and a permanent occupation of the soil. [...] As the landowners are not brought together, they have no public wants to satisfy; in a word, there is no *res publica*. Moral progress, and the cultivation of the intellect, are here not only neglected [...] but impossible. Where can a school be placed for the instruction of children living ten leagues apart in all directions? (21-22)

Sarmiento links the city landscape to the cultural development of the *res publica*. A similar argument is made by the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, who argues that the built form of the city (*urbs*) and the human relationships (*civitas*) in it influence each other (316). Whereas the immensity of landscape in its spatial sense may form the natural resources of a nation, Sarmiento sees the same features are devastating in a platial sense:

Its own extent is the evil from which the Argentine Republic suffers; the desert encompasses it on every side and penetrates its very heart; wastes containing no human dwelling are, generally speaking, the unmistakable boundaries between its several provinces. Immensity is the universal characteristic of the country: the plains, the woods, the rivers, all are immense; and the horizon is always undefined, always lost in haze and delicate vapors which forbid the eye to mark the point in the distant perspective, where the land ends and the sky begins. (9)

The important point here is not whether Sarmiento is right in his conclusions but rather that he asks the question of how landscape structures human interaction, also in an aesthetic sense.

Also today there are academic fields exploring the interplay between landscape and culture. Environmental psychology maps the effects of natural and created environments on individuals and collectives. Whereas environmental psychology focuses on the human response to environmental and landscape features, the field of bioregionalism starts out with mapping ecological conditions, such as climate zones, watersheds, soil, etc., and then describing how cultures adapt to those conditions. Whereas environmental psychology is predominantly scientific and empirical, bioregionalism contains an element of environmental activism. Tim Ingold goes one step further and criticizes the culture/nature binary that underlies concepts of landscape, stating, “I reject the division between inner and outer worlds—respectively of mind and matter, meaning and substance—upon which such a distinction rests. The landscape, I hold, is not a picture in the imagination, surveyed by the mind’s eye [...]” (191). What all presented approaches have in common is the understanding of landscape as a system that includes human and non-human, material and cultural elements. Ratzel and Sarmiento should be remembered not as environmental determinists but as precursors of a modern systemic understanding of landscape.

### **Landscape in different languages**

The following section surveys concepts of landscape in different languages, not in order to present authoritative studies of those languages but to illustrate how different cultural frames of reference create different understandings of landscape. Whereas some cases are documented in some detail, others are sketches. In some cases we additionally rely on our own command of the language (English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian), in others (Thai, Arabic) we rely on the statements of one or few informants.

#### *Landscape in English*

The meaning of landscape has changed in English. Olwig notices that the current version of the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines landscape as “a particular area of activity: scene <the political landscape>” and deems its earlier meaning as “vista, prospect” obsolete. This can be seen as a revival of the earlier platial meaning which “brings us back full circle to the earliest meaning of landscape as a place shaped by a polity” (Olwig, “Danish Landscapes” 10). However, the examples in the dictionary reflect the spatial and visual meanings, including the one considered obsolete: “She likes to paint landscapes. / The farm is set in a landscape of rolling hills. / He gazed out at the beautiful landscape.” Also, the definition is incongruous, as the first definitions are about representing (“the art of depicting such scenery”) and representation (“a picture representing a view of natural inland scenery”) but deems the represented (“vista, prospect”) as obsolete (Merriam-Webster n.p.). This incoherence can be seen as the effect of an ongoing platial shift in the use of landscape, visible in the way the term is used in the ELC. The same trend appearing in English can be observed in the other Germanic languages, but here, as Olwig points out, it blends with an older use of the

term landscape, which implies landscape as territory. It is, however, unlikely that landscape will regain a fully administrative sense in English or other Germanic languages, but a historical remnant of the territorial use can still be found in the official Swedish name of the autonomous Finnish Åland Islands, *Landskapet Åland*.

### *Landscape in Spanish*

When Olwig argues that the Italianate landscape tradition is spatial, the Spanish term *paisaje* can be expected to have a spatial meaning. In informal e-mail exchanges with academic native speakers where I brought up the topic of landscape, one respondent pointed out that that landscape is a visual/aesthetic concept related to something agreeable, also used in a poetic meaning in songs. This statement fits with the hypothesis of a spatial meaning. However, another respondent explained that originally *paisaje* referred to the spatial extension of territory seen from a place but has later acquired a geographical, community-oriented, and ecological meaning. This is an indication that there may be a spatial shift of the meaning of *paisaje* in Spanish, possibly related to a growing ecological awareness, requiring further research.

### *Landscape in Palestine*

The following sketch of the meaning of landscape in Arabic is based on an interview with Osama Jarrar, who teaches English at the Arab American University in Jenin in the Occupied Palestinian Territory of the West Bank. He mentions three ways to refer to the surface of the Earth. The first is as private land; land ownership is an important aspect of Palestinian culture, defining social status and being a core element of identity. The second meaning is land in a collective sense. This land, however, is no longer under Palestinian control. He writes, "My Land is no longer my Land; we fight for it." This term carries the two linked implications together and is translated into Arabic as *Watani* (possessive, my country and everybody's, that is Palestine). In fact, the other meaning for *Watani* in Arabic is "the patriot." A third meaning of landscape "explicitly carries aesthetic values of love and friendship and implicitly refers to the beautiful part of my Land no longer with us" (Jarrar).

The three conceptions of landscape based on ownership, identity, and aesthetics are interrelated. The conception of landscape as *Watani* is part of a national narrative, albeit of a nation that does not control its territory. In Palestine landscape imagination refers to land only under limited control, to land in which two territorial structures (Jewish settlements and Palestinian villages) are laid upon each other, leading to endless conflicts. The situation in Palestine is an example of the meaning of landscape for a dispossessed people.

There are few places in the world where the meaning of landscape has been so intensely projected onto land, and in which such an abundance of spatial perspectives makes the spatial notions of landscape invisible. In his book *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a*

*Vanishing Landscape*, Raja Shehadeh attempts to recover the seemingly lost platial meaning:

Palestine has been one of the countries most visited by pilgrims and travellers over the ages. The accounts I have read do not describe a land familiar to me but rather a land of these travellers' imaginations. Palestine has been constantly re-invented, with devastating consequences to its original inhabitants. Whether it was the cartographer preparing maps or travellers describing the landscape in the extensive travel literature, what mattered was not the land and its inhabitants as they actually were but the confirmation of the viewer or reader's religious or political beliefs. I can only hope that this book does not fall into this tradition. (xii)

Although there is both a platial and spatial sense of landscape in Arabic, spatial projections of non-Palestinian cultures obscure the platial sense of the existing landscape.

### *Landscape in Thailand*

For the following case, the statements of three Thai scholars were used. Thai language borrows words for referring to landscape, either using the English word landscape, or, with synonymous meaning, from Pali/Sanskrit the words *phumithat* (*phum* = land area /geographic and *that* = looking) or *phuminiwet* (*nivet* = eco (as in ecology)). The terms refer to an area larger than an individual plot of land containing natural features, such as a pond, a forest, a flat land, agricultural land, or a garden. Landscape then is the entirety of the natural elements and how those elements are arranged, aesthetically and eco-systemically. Landscape is not automatically linked to the human world, but if it is, human presence forms part of the whole. One can, for example, debate how the *phumithat* of a university campus can be improved. Landscape primarily means natural features and habitats, and these features create community. For example, in the central area of Thailand people live on different levels (mountains, highland, lowland, plains), which determine their choice of crops and thus their culture. Religion also enters landscape, as the relation to land is influenced by the three Buddhist principles: do good deeds, avoid evil deeds, and purify the mind. Particularly, the spiritual aspect of landscape is seen when some trees have yellow ribbons tied around them, signifying that they are to be treated like monks. Some monasteries are set in a forested landscape in which monks have built their cells as small huts between the trees. In holy groves, used for ceremonies, no trees would be cut. In Thailand, nature is seen as a positive force, and the understanding of landscape combines an aesthetic perspective with a spiritual and eco-systemic one, the latter includes human beings but is not dominated by them. The absence of a nature/culture dichotomy means that landscape cannot be framed in a platial/spatial understanding but is understood systemically. During a fieldwork in the Thai province of Isaan one of the authors visited the Inpang Community Network of farmers who abandoned monoculture and created a more diverse landscape, an "edible forest" on their farms. Besides the reduction of dependency from agribusiness, a major motivating factor for this shift was that they perceived ecological diversity and interaction with the land and with the community of their cooperative as beautiful. This shows how the aesthetic dimension can form part of

a systemic understanding of landscape and also have repercussions on the political frame.

### *Landscape in Russia*

There are two terms for landscape in Russian, *peizazh*, derived from the French *paisage*, and *landshaft*, derived from German *Landschaft*. Whereas *peizazh* is used for artistic representations of land, *landshaft* has a scientific and material sense, referring to terrain, for example, the geological terrain of Northern Ural. Both terms are spatial, as they see land from a single vantage point of national artistic or scientific interest. In order to understand the spatial dominance of the perception of landscape in Russian, one can turn to Christopher Ely's book, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia*, covering the time span from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the October Revolution in 1917. During that time, Ely describes the evolution of the concept of landscape undergoing drastic changes but remaining spatial.

According to Ely, the idea of landscape in the sense of "the surrounding world [that] can provide visual, aesthetic satisfaction" is introduced to Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (27). The landscape ideals of that time were the sublime Alps and, especially influential in Russia, the Arcadian landscapes of Italy. The problem was that Russian landscapes did not at all look like Tuscany: "Thus striving to keep current with Western aesthetics, toward the end of the eighteenth century educated Russians began to face the difficult problem of trying to reconcile the idea of pastoral landscape they had learned to appreciate with the physical surroundings and social conditions of the country they lived in" (28). The elite then had cosmopolitan ideals, in which "it was more important to belong to an international community of cultured individuals than to the culture of a certain country" (36). At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, landscape appreciation meant landscapes outside Russia. When Russian landscapes were depicted at all, they were given Central European characteristics. Russian gardens did not create the illusion of being one with the surrounding land and consequently did not use the invisible ditch or ha-ha wall like in England, but their tree species stood in sharp contrast to the surrounding countryside (46). When in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century scientific explorations began to describe the land and to assess its economic value, aesthetic sensibility did not follow immediately: "While scientists and explorers worked to identify the unique characteristics of Russian topography, settlement, flora, and fauna, etc., poets almost always held to standard neoclassical models of landscape description" (40). While *landshaft* became a structuring element of scientific and economic development, the Russian *peizazh* remained invisible, and landscape was found elsewhere: "Wealthy Russian tourists, and Russian artists on stipends, went to Italy to immerse themselves in the warm climate, the majesty of Italian art, and the beauty of southern landscape" (64).

From the 1840s writers began to discover and depict the Russian landscape: "The open countryside was coming to be considered one of Russia's important and characteristic national features, whereas only a decade earlier it was still largely disdained and ignored" (118). This national focus soon developed into a rejection of the

picturesque, similar to the wilderness cult in the United States (123) and “Russians turned the perceived absence of beautiful and spectacular scenery into a special national virtue” (134). The perceived emptiness became a virtue: “Vast empty space called to mind untapped possibility, the promise of a young nation, and hopes for future greatness” (137). Interestingly, this evaluation of emptiness is diametrically opposed to Sarmiento, but one has to keep in mind that Sarmiento focuses on the effects of landscape on human beings and local communities, whereas the emptiness is seen in terms of national resources in Russia. Landscape was now fully instrumentalized for the creation of a national identity. The two meanings, scientific and aesthetic, converged again. However, both *landshaft* and *peizazh* were perceptions of a privileged urban class. How did peasants fit into the landscape?

There was an evolution in the representation of peasants, from invisibility, dismissal, ethnographic study, idealization to glorification, but all those were the representations of the urban privileged class. The lack of a partial understanding of landscape is a result of the serf system, of an extreme class divide. There were no free farmers like in northern Europe; peasants did not count as political subjects, and consequently, landscape was not seen as their territory. When peasants became visible, there often was a sense of disappointment: “Quite often those who had already traveled in the West looked around them in Russia and saw impoverished serfs rather than shepherds and shepherdesses” (Ely 54). Later there would be idealizations of country life, showing well-dressed and well-fed peasants (71). During the realist period then there were attempts to “visualize the landscape as the unified homeland of all the Russian people” (89), and there were also ethnographic representations (146). Urban and rural genre painting “could express nationality while maintaining a level of social criticism, whereas landscape painting was too far removed from topical issues, with a tendency to dissolve into nostalgia” (173).

Landscape paintings were produced for wealthy buyers (Ely 196), and the aestheticization of peasants in them must also be seen as a distancing. Even in the case of the “wanderer” movement, where painters went into the villages, peasants remain a visual element: “These landscapes formulate a viewer position that allowed the urban spectator to fantasize looking at the countryside with the eyes of an insider, with the eyes of a Russian peasant” (Ely 217). Some painters preferred landscape paintings depicting wilderness areas without a human presence. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, landscape depictions became part of commercial culture for people with their dacha in the countryside or for those who went on leisure trips to the Volga (224).

A prevalent feature in Russian landscape paintings is their placeless character. Ely writes about Andrei Martynov, a painter of the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “The resulting landscapes [...] exhibit gentle placelessness as reminiscent of England as it is of Siberia” (53). In another mid-century painter, Alexei Savrasov, “the painting has a timeless and placeless quality; there is nothing notably Russian about its natural surroundings” (Ely 177) The Russian realist paintings also reflected general conditions, even when they depicted specific locations: “the Russian realists gave titles to their paintings that reflected general conditions, i.e., Morning in a Pine Forest, After the Rain,

Birch Grove. [...] Where much realist painting sought to limit its vision to specific locations or isolated moments in time, the Russian titles prepared viewers to see landscapes as part of a larger whole” (198).

The development of the terms *landshaft* and *peizazh* thus express different aspects of the spatial perspective, and also today there is little platial sense of landscape. Peasants may admire the beauty of the “endless green sea” of the forest surrounding their village, but the landscape outside the village limits is under state control, even though the villagers use it for hunting and gathering. A platial understanding of landscape is linked to the control of local populations through the land they use, and in Russia, despite all the revolutions, relations between peasants and officials remain hierarchical.

### *Landscape in China*

The concept of landscape has been developing over time in China. The classical Chinese landscape (園 *Yuan*) refers to an environment for the upper class, used for recreation and appreciated aesthetically. The ideal landform of this environment is an improved natural beauty, implying that one learns from natural beauty in the design of landscape (Du, Li and Liu n.p.). The traditional landscape is a creation of a “second nature,” compensating for the relative human isolation from nature (Zhou n.p.). The idea of second nature also guides artistic representation, such as in landscape paintings, novels, poems, drama, and calligraphy. Traditional landscape ideals are expressions of political power and only could be enjoyed by the upper classes. Ordinary citizens had no right to visit and appreciate those classical landscapes; they were supposed to work on the farms in order to survive and pay the rent.

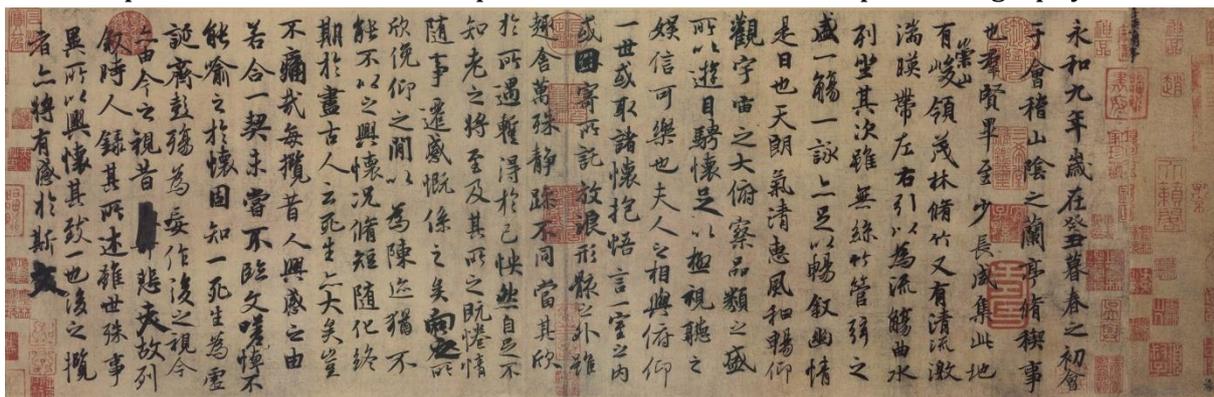
Ely points out the spiritual aspect of the Chinese landscape: “China developed a powerful form of landscape imagery that served the purposes of the Taoist vision of order and eternity in nature” (10). The philosophy of Chinese landscape design is based on three pillars: Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. The ideal of landscape design is “deriving from nature but higher than nature,” i.e., creating an ideal nature based on natural principles. This ideal nature is found in traditional gardens and is a common theme in artistic representations in Chinese novels, poetry, opera, painting and calligraphy. An example is the novel *Dream of Red Mansions* by Cao Xueqin set in a “Great View Garden” containing all the beauties of heaven and earth, hills surrounded by water, and mountains inset with pavilions. In landscape paintings, one can also see the principle of “derived from nature but higher than nature;” for example, Gongwang Huang’s “Living in Fu Mountain in Spring” (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Gongwang Huang's "Living in Fu Mountain in Spring"

([http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Dwelling\\_in\\_the\\_Fuchun\\_Mountains\\_%28first\\_half%29.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Dwelling_in_the_Fuchun_Mountains_%28first_half%29.JPG))

An example of traditional Chinese poem written about landscape in calligraphy:



Lanting Xu (蘭亭序) is a famous work of calligraphy by Wang Xizhi

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lantingji\\_Xu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lantingji_Xu))

In modern times, the term landscape (景观 *Jing Guan*) is more widely used than the term 'garden,' and the idea of landscape is similar to the western idea of landscape, such as that of the ELC. Such landscapes are now found in city parks, which are common in China. The current concept of landscape in Chinese is influenced by industrialization, globalization and urbanization, and it has been developed through modern science and technology. Landscape is a complex phenomenon integrating land, human beings, culture, history, security, health, and sustainability; it is not exclusively seen as something that should be aesthetically pleasing. This can be seen in the definition of landscape in the popular online dictionary of the Baidu browser. The present notion of landscape challenges the traditional ideas on the Chinese garden and marks a transition from an exclusive use of landscape by the upper class to a more inclusive and participatory model, one that also includes the local population (Chang et al 67-68). Representations of people in the landscape are shifting from one which includes only the

perceptions of the rich and powerful to one that people of any social class and background can relate to. Chinese landscape now can be appreciated by anyone, rich or poor.

### **Antonyms of landscape**

Here we use the term antonym in its wider meaning as a lexical opposite. It is an inherent feature of language that identical terms can have different meanings. The reason here can be language varieties (as the British and American meaning of “football”), but also shifting social conditions and values changing the meaning of seemingly universal terms. Anthony Giddens describes how modernization transformed the understanding of friendship from being a support network in traditional societies to having the function of emotional proximity and intimacy in modern society, in which the “abstract systems” of the modern state take care of existential needs, such as welfare and security. One way to detect this shift in meaning, i.e., to elucidate the semantic properties of a term, is to look for its antonym. In the case of the term friend, there are, according to Giddens, several antonyms or opposites. In a traditional society, a friend can be someone with whom I have an alliance, then the antonym is enemy; a friend can also mean someone from the in-group of a local community, then the antonym is stranger. However, in modern society the antonym of friend is acquaintance, i.e., a person with whom I do not share emotional proximity (Giddens 118-19). In a similar way, the shifting meanings of landscape are visible in its antonyms: the anti-landscape and the non-landscape.

#### *The anti-landscape*

Landscape can have a negative meaning either when negative meaning is projected onto the land (as in the case of the desert in the Bible) or if the interaction of human and natural forces yields negative results. The latter can be caused by a miscalculation of natural forces (as in Chernobyl) or because landscape is fraught with contradictory cultural values, such as is the case in the American suburb; this type of landscape can be called anti-landscape (Bigell n.p.). Simon Schama uses a different sense of anti-landscape in his discussion of contemporary landscape painters: “So instead of having pictorial tradition dictate to nature, they have tried hard to dissolve the artistic ego within natural process. Their aim is to produce an anti-landscape where the intervention of the artist is reduced to the most minimal and transient mark on the earth” (Schama 12). These two understandings of anti-landscape are related. Whereas it is possible that human interaction yields negative results, the painters who Schama describes see artistic interaction with landscape per se as problematic and try to reduce it. Not only artistic interaction, all human interaction is seen as problematic among some environmental historians who are influenced by anti-anthropocentrism (12-13). Those meanings of anti-landscape are spatial because they assume an abstracted human relation to the landscape.

### *The non-landscape*

In a platial sense landscape is the territory of a community, and the antonym of this notion of landscape denotes areas outside that community or that have no relation to it, a non-landscape. In pre-modern times, wilderness filled this semantic position. Contrastingly, Romanticism valued wilderness, and today, wilderness is a cultural landscape, a temporal retreat from society, and venerated for its aesthetic qualities. The shift of meaning is seen in the traditional Norwegian terms *innmark* (infields), *utmark* (outfields), and *villmark* (wilderness). Each still has its original meaning in agricultural settings, but city dwellers do not use *innmark*, see *utmark* as an area for outdoor activities (see discussion of *friluftsliv* above), and use *villmark* when referring to an outdoor adventure area.

If the concept of landscape implies a material resource, in the sense of the Russian *landshaft*, the antonym of landscape is wasteland. A wasteland may be unproductive for agriculture, lack mineral resources, or have no strategic value. In the global landscape of the tourism industry, a wasteland could be said to be not a wilderness, which in the current context implies a destination, but the unmarked space between attractions. A wasteland is only glanced at through bus windows. In a military sense, the term no-man's-land is used in a similar sense as wasteland.

Another sense of non-landscape is the nonecumene. A nonecumene is land that is "not ours," not owned, controlled, or used by a community. In the West Bank, Palestinians see Jewish settlements as mere obstacles in their daily lives, whereas for Jewish settlers, Palestinian lands are the areas they have to move through to get to the next place under their control. Here, two geographies overlay each other, and spaces in between under control of the other side are nonecumenes.

Globalization has created a new type of nonecumenical non-landscapes, areas that have no relation to community and that are, despite their high visibility, hardly ever looked at. Non-landscape here is used in analogy to Marc Augé's term "non-place." According to Augé a non-place is characterized by its lack of community relation:

Like a place is characterized through identity, relations, and history, a space without identity that can neither be called relational nor historical is a non-place. Our hypothesis is that hypermodernity creates non-places. [...] A world that relegates birth and death to the hospital, a world in which the number of transit spaces and temporary employment under luxurious or detestable conditions is constantly growing (the hotel chains and transit camps, the holiday villages, the refugee camps, the slums earmarked for demolition or degradation), a world in which a tight network of means of transportation develops that double as mobile dwellings, where those who are familiar with large distances, automatic routers, and credit cards link themselves to the gestures of a silent traffic, a world that is given to lonely individualism, transit, the provisional and ephemeral provides the anthropologist with a new object [...]. (Augé 83; our translation)

Augé here thinks mainly about the functional aspect of places, but when one focuses on their spatial extension, one can speak about non-landscapes, such as airport landscapes, Disneyland-like pedestrian zones in cities, isolated all-inclusive resorts, and freeway interchanges. They are neither expressive of community nor of a community-oriented

politics: “The non-place is the opposite of a utopia; it exists but does not host an organic society” (Augé 111; my translation). The fact that globalization creates such non-landscapes is not surprising since the idea of a global community is largely an extrapolation; it is difficult to speak meaningfully of a global landscape.

An example of how a non-landscape can turn into a landscape is the Tempelhof airport in Berlin. One of Germany’s first airports, it opened in 1923 and was once situated outside the city, but the city grew around it. When it was closed in 2008, the people of the city found itself with an enormous new area and wondered what to do with it. The decision was made to find multiple uses for the bombastic terminal building and to leave the airfield unchanged, using it for fairs, community gardens, and for recreation (walking, bicycling, kite-surfing). The temporary use gives the city’s community time to negotiate future permanent uses, and for the time being, the area is administered by the *Allmendekontor* (*Allmende* is German for commons). Until 2008 the airport was a non-landscape, seen but not noticed. Today, many visitors use the unaltered runways and grassy areas, thereby showing that the airport has become part of a community and been converted to a platial landscape.

## Conclusion

While the basic meaning of the term landscape, a section of the surface of our planet, shows little variation, different cultural contexts modify the meaning of landscape. In English and other Germanic languages, an older community-oriented platial usage has given way to a spatial perspective, only to shift again towards the platial, as is seen in the ELC. This reflects the transition from a feudal society to the nation state to a multilevel government that emphasizes local and regional territorial units. The inclusive attitude is also seen in the fact that landscape now refers not only to privileged natural scenes but to all types of spaces, including degraded urban areas. Other languages also show the shifting reference frames and cultural values of the term landscape. Spanish does not have a traditional platial understanding of the term but is developing a platial understanding through European integration. The traditional Palestinian focus on land ownership and the meanings of aesthetic value and collective identity created by concepts of landscape are under intense pressure due to the occupation. Russian has no concept of platial landscape but distinguishes between two spatial concepts, one scientific, one aesthetic. In the Buddhist tradition of Thailand, a holistic and spiritual understanding of humans in nature appears to be dominant. Chinese also appears to use the term in a holistic fashion, and the idea of a created harmony of a second nature is central; China has also seen a democratization of landscape access.

In different languages, landscape means different things, but a common denominator is territorial demarcation. Demarcation allows the notion of landscape to function as a master frame for other perspectives: aesthetics, politics, agriculture, tourism, spirituality, geology, culture, ecology, hydrology, technology, tradition, education, military, etc. The advantage of such a concept of landscape is that it has the

power to move toward a more complex understanding of interactions between different human and natural factors in a limited area. Landscape is not a still image but an expression of historical and natural forces shaping the environment. Seeing landscape as a process of systemic interactions of material and cultural forces sheds a new light on the question of whether culture shapes landscape or landscape shapes culture. Rather than asking whether landscape is the product or material base of culture, landscape can be seen as a co-evolutionary historical process of cultural and material forces. Seen in this light, Ratzel and Sarmiento are not environmental determinists but investigate the material and psychological frames of landscape formation. The antonyms of landscape are antonyms to specific understandings of landscape which are hidden under the identical terminological surface. The anti-landscape is either a projection of negative cultural meaning onto the land and/or a failed transformation of landscape. The non-landscape is a platial concept, indicating that a community lacks relation to an area. Different periods and different focuses have created names for non-landscapes: wilderness, wasteland, no-man's land, nonecumene, and non-place. Whereas wilderness is no longer seen as non-landscape in industrialized societies, there is an increasing number of non-places as a consequence of increased mobility and the placelessness associated with modernity.

Landscape has the potential to bring back ideas of territoriality and community into the debates in the field of the environmental humanities, seeing people not as a species, as is the case in the terms environment and anthropocene, but as historically bound and politically interested actors asking who owns, controls, and uses the land in landscape (for example in debates about the commons) and who determines the frames for its perception. Landscape is not a concept for freezing an obsolete and visual perception of the world but a versatile and adaptable term to frame the dynamic human relations with their specific environments.

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