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LANDSCAPE - VISUAL EXPERIENCE OF SPACE

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The study analyses the visual experience with landscape. In everyday visual experience reveals its hierarchic structure. Visual perception of landscape occurs simultaneously in three time-spatial levels. The highest hierarchic level consists of distant motionless horizon. Ephemeral local event creates the lowest level. Medium time-spatial level belongs to the landscape that is more rigid form than locality on one side, and more flexible as distance on the other. Hierarchic time-spatial structure of visual experience is a suitable salient point at the conception of the concept landscape.

Key words: time-spatial structure, distance, locality landscape, region, man

INTRODUCTION

The word landscape is a part of colloquial language that can be translated in foreign languages. It refers to certain visually perceivable space. Comprehensibility of this word causes no problems. We all know, what space is meant by the word. But it is a knowledge at the level of colloquial language, where a high ratio of superficiality, inexactness and hinting does not represent any obstacle to comprehensibility. But the situation changes if we try to include the word landscape in the scientific language. It is then, when the problems

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appear. To define landscape, to align to the word landscape a concept landscape is a surprisingly complicated problem. In spite of considerable effort and a rich literature on landscape, this problem is no satisfactorily solved. There is a lot of causes. This study is oriented to one of them, outside the focus of attention.

Though the word landscape refers to certain visible, apparently generally known space, we run into difficulties if we want to delimit this space more precisely. Landscape is visible, it can be looked at, it can be seen, but it is not so simple to say, where precisely is our sight aimed at, when we look at it, and see it. In other words, the word landscape refers to certain object (a cut of objective reality), but this object is not precisely delimited, landscape is not precisely identified. (Under the term identification we understand the relation word-object). This is a more serious drawback, as it might seem at the first glance. It is difficult to create a concept landscape, if it is not clear what object is this concept related to. It is difficult to judge truthfulness of this concept, if it is not known what or what object is talked about. It is difficult to introduce order into chaotic and hypertrophied concept level without exact determination of its subject.

In our study we shall try to remove the mentioned drawback, we shall try to identify the landscape. We shall go back to the basic visual experience with it. We shall try to show at the conclusion that this fundamental structure anticipates certain concepts, that analysis of visual experience with landscape can constitute an introduction to the knowledge of landscape.

Landscape can be looked at and seen. But not from anywhere. Ján Kollár (1862) describes it as follows: "It is in my nature that, wherever I can, I try to stand at the highest point, to see at one glance the whole and then look at the details, and thus obtain a preliminary complete picture of any object, and preserve it in my memory" (J. Kollár 1862).

In an effort to see the landscape, we all spontaneously behave like J. Kollár. But the spontaneity of this act easily covers its sense and substance. The sense of the ascent is to give our visual angle a characteristic structure, which comprises the landscape. Through the ascent we obtain distance from the details. Details do not disappear from the visual field, but they do not dominate it anymore. By means of ascent also other phenomena appear in the visual field. Also distance in form of horizon limiting our visual field will appear in it. Though the view is not obstructed by anything, it cannot penetrate further. This open, mobile border is the distance. Our visual field is therefore created by horizon in form of all-embracing formation, with the centre of the field in form of some kind of focus, represented by our position. The view oscillates between the distant empty horizon and details in the focus. Elementary visual experience with landscape belongs to universal human experience. Only few people were able to express this experience, among them landscape painters. And even among them only few. The landscape can constitute a background to a picture, it can be a supplement of other scene, it can express the feeling, and mood, mental disposition of the painter, etc. Paintings conceived in such manner have not - regardless their artistic value - any significance for the solution of our problem. We are interested in a non-reflected view of the painter on landscape, view for which the landscape represents the only object of interest. We could talk about a "matter-of-fact" approach of the painter to the landscape, where the expression "matter-of-fact" is in the sense E. Filla used it (1953). This criterion will bring us to Dutch painters of the 16th and 17th centuries. Among them many have reflected landscape in such an excellent way that

behind the variegated scale of the pictured phenomena, the fundamental landscape structure distinctly shows. It seems as if in this period and in this region, the man saw for the first time the landscape and realized what he sees.

THE PICTURE OF LANDSCAPE

The sight of man is in many landscape paintings set on far distance. In some of them the distance even dominates. The details in this painting do not even enter the visual field (Fig.1). Also the very position is not certain. The sight is fixed in far distance, horizon, contact of spheres, contact of the sea and sky, among which there is often a narrow strip of firm land. Visual experience can hardly be more reduced. Space here has nature of infinite emptiness, with everything immersed in it, in which everything disappears and distorts. The space as distance, as infinitely continuous emptiness is a fundamental structure of this painting.

But it is not only space that can be seen. Distance pictured on these paintings has an integrate time dimension, it is an embodiment of motionlessness. What can be changed in horizon, what can change the basic spatial structure like the contact of water, air and land? From the point of view of the spectator it is something perfectly static, he sees, what other generations had seen before him, and what will be seen by the forthcoming ones. (Only knowledge mediated by science teaches us to see behind this spatial structure a movement within the geological dimensions). That what creates the skeleton of these paintings is what shows behind the pictured phenomena - stable distance.

Characteristic is also position of man in this big and motionless time-space. Individual features of the individuals are so much suppressed that we more feel the human beings rather than see them. They are in the towns, ships, in the distance, etc. Man is a marginal phenomenon, epiphenomenon, existentially dependent on nature. Nature's dictation, above all that of inorganic nature, is unambiguous. Only a strip of land between the sea and sky is cultivated, touched by human work. Only this space is a home of humans, the home man abandons with risk. Motionless distance is a dangerous, rough environment.

Also these paintings contain at least a hint of foreground. Foreground creates a counterpoint to the motionless distance. But if we want to see the structure of this space, our attention must be turned to other paintings. They are composed in such a way that the emphasis is laid upon the first plan of the picture, foreground. Details dominate, position of spectator is precisely located, certain locality, place is pictured. Animals, trees, shrubs, people, roads, houses, creek, etc. are represented. All this is so represented that individual feature of the pictured objects, face features, time clothing, architectural details can be identified. Also species and family of animals and plant appurtenance can be identified. The details of terrain, rocks, cuts and steps are represented. In the flowing water waves or still water surface can be seen. Also the momentary climatic situation can be distinguished. The pictured space is full of things. There is no emptiness here, the space is occupied by some objects all over the place. The objects are separated by clear borders and that provides the space with discontinuous structure. Local place filled by objects is corresponded by a determined time. Time dimension of the pictures is negligible. All here is ephemeral. All will be changed soon. People and animals will be moved, trees will get green or coloured by autumn hues, everything will be covered by snow, the creek will inundate or dry, etc.



Fig. 1. Salomon van Ruysdael: Rhine landscape.



Fig. 3. Pieter Bruegel: Hunters in the snow (January).

Some of these pictures have a nature of still life, in which the author with great effort succeeded in stopping the omnipresent change and movement.

Fundamental structure of these paintings is an ephemeral local event. Man's position within it is a typical one. This locally changing space is heavily marked by human work. It is literally full of human works mixed with nature - buildings, roads, domestic animals, cultivated trees, ruderal vegetation, regulated creek, pond, etc. In this cultivated space there is home of man. He is not epiphenomenon here, he is the landlord, though hard working, but yet landlord, steward.

In the paintings with dominating environment there is suggested the existence of larger space. If we want to know the nature of this space, we have to change the visual field. In many paintings, but best in those of P. Breughel, three equivalent spaces are represented: foreground (locality), central space (landscape) and background (far distance). Landscape can be seen in them as space between the far distance and locality.

Structure of landscape is different from that of locality and far distance. It has a form of tiny mosaics, it is full of different phenomena, and thus similar to the foreground of the painting. But it consists of other objects, than the ones filling the foreground-locality. If we see in the foreground trees, than we see a forest in the landscape. This sentence can be interpreted not only literally, but also as a principle. If we see details in the foreground, than we see wholes in greater distance, contrast to the details in the foreground is composition in distance. We do not see in the central plan of the painting water in landscape, we see river, we do not see rocks, clay and stone, we see hills, slopes, and valleys. Animals are less distinguishable, herd is seen. Persons disappear from the visual field and crowds, population enter into it. Individual features of the individual buildings are lost, villages and towns appear. We see a variegated mosaics composed of not only individual objects, things, but the wholes, details give way to composition.

Landscape has a different structure from that of the distance. In the distance, basic spheres - sky, sea, and land meet. They are separated, each of them has its corresponding homogeneous space. But the landscape lacks homogeneous space. Inorganic, organic and human phenomena have the form of different networks (river network, that of the communes, etc.) mutually closely intermingled into one formation.

Landscape is corresponded not only by a specific space, but also by a specific time. This space is more dynamic than the distance, yet more rigid, than locality. Water in the river irreversibly flows away, but the river stays. It is not completely still, though. It shifts its bed, meanders, goes wild, cuts, swells. But it is a limited motion. River does not leave the bottom of the valley. It is a movement in the background of duration and duration on the background of the ephemeral. Again it is not only a specific case of river, it is simultaneously a principle. Single trees die and are born. But the forest lasts, though not absolutely. Single buildings are built and crashed. But the commune lasts, again not in absolute sense, etc.

Man's position too, in the landscape is ambivalent. This space bears abundant traces of human work. It is not a pure nature, it is cultivated nature. Man here is not an epiphenomenon like it was in the distance. But on the other side, the landscape is not in such a rate a result of human work, as compared to the locality. Certain, numerous natural constants, hardly susceptible to human work, occur in the space. Man can only accept them. Here belong above all basic surface forms and basic geological, hydrological and climatic phenomena. Man here is not a landlord, similar to the locality. This space represents for man a trap and refuge, home and threat in one. Fundamental structure of the landscape is typically doubled.



Fig. 2. Jan van Goyen: The ferry near the village.

The view of the observer oscillates between horizon and stand, it pays attention to "first of all a whole, and then to the parts". It perceives the landscape as comprised (in the distance) on one side and as a containing one (locality) on the other. This dichotomy appears in mosaics. In relation to the distance the landscape appears as mosaics decomposing the continuum of the distance to discontinuum. On the background of motionlessness of the distance it appears as a motion introducing in it a certain time. It appears as an invasion of time-spatial discontinuum into the time-spatial continuum of horizon, as invasion of autonomy, on which the dictation of large homogeneous, almost motionless forms crash. In relation to locality landscape appears also as a mosaics, but in completely different function. Landscape includes locality into larger time-spatial connections, suppressing individuality of the single objects. It suppresses the detail for the sake of composition. On the background of ephemeral locality it appears as perduring form. In relation to locality, landscape appears as annex of time-spatial autonomy of locality to the time-spatial totality of landscape.

Our reflections were based in the situation of observer, who looks at the landscape of one point. Through the movement of observer each locality can be jitted out over the horizon. Horizon can be gradually changed to single localities. In spite of the mentioned differences between the locality, landscape and distance, these space mutually do not expell, they are congruous.

NOTION LANDSCAPE

Reflexions on visual experience with landscape are closely related to the notion "landscape". Finally, their meaning and sense lied in the relation to this notion. In the 80-ties we have along with E. Mazúr and J. Drdoš tried to lay dow foundations of "landscape synthesis" (Mazúr et al., 1980, Urbánek et al. 1980, Drdoš et al. 1980, Mazúr et al. 1983). One of the points of this synthesis was the notion "landscape". This notion was conceived leaning on the three of classical categories : matter, space and time. In agreement with these three catogories we interpreted landscape as synergic, chorologic and chronologic systems. However, this three-member classical ontological scheme leads landscape synthesis to a stalemate. Category matter (synergic system) comes to the foreground. It becomes the main carrier of the characters, relations, events, etc. Category of space and time (chorologic and chronologic system) are being suppressed. They take over a function of empty container, where the things and events are placed and occur. Moreover, the conventional thinking clearly formulated specially by J. Bergson (1970) devaluates above all the category of space. Classical ontological scheme as a salient point for the conception of notion "landscape" revealed itself unsuitable. It devaluates precisely the category, which is fundamental for geographical thinking, category of space. We realized this deep discrepancy between classical thinking and its ontology on one side and geographical on the other, almost simultaneously at the conception of the fundaments of landscape synthesis. We felt necessity to get rid of the trap represented by classical ontology and to substitute it by the ontology, where the space constitutes a fundamental ontology. But we ran to a problem analyzed by J. Soja (1989), a problem appearing also in structuralism (G. Deleuze 1974). That is why, we dedicated several studies to the category of space. (Mazúr and Urbánek, 1982, 1983, 1984, Urbánek 1992). By the means of the notion "event", defined by N.A. Whitehead (1971) as a "character of place through a period time", we tried to overcome the difference between the space and time. Simultaneously we tried to abandon the classically interpreted matter and to interpret it as space and time maker. With regard to great inertia of traditional thinking not only within broad community of geographers, but above all our thinking, we were able to present these problems rather than to solve them. Out of the entire spectrum of difficulties we were meeting with, one is closely related to this study.

Along conception of the notion "landscape" it was difficult to verify the truthfulness of our conceptions. Truth is as Aristotle defines it: "adequation intellectus et rei". But in agreement with this definition it is difficult to talk about the truthfulness of our conceptions, because the landscape-object was missing. It was not clear to what object should our concept be adequate to. We ran into a serious and neglected drawback of the science of landscape and possible all geography. N. Hartman (1973) writes: "The substance of every kind of knowledge implies that it is not oriented to itself, but to its object." Interest in the object of knowledge is a primary, interest in reflection is secondary. We believe that in the science of landscape prevails at the present moment the secondary interest. As if the point here were a hypertrophied reflection. We are drowned in a quantity of concepts, truthfulness of which is difficult to prove, because it is not clear with what object they should be confronted. That is why we turned our attention to the landscape-object, to the visual experience with it. In agreement with N.A. Whitehead (1971) we supposed that between the sensual experience and conceptual level there is no bifurcation. We tried to describe the kind of

visual experience with landscape that represents an entry gate in the knowledge of landscape and that is silently referred to by many of our studies. Besides the mentioned older studies these are the ones that touch the problem of hierarchically organized time-spatial structures. In narrow geomorphological context it is a study of "The principle of geomorphological catena" (J. Urbánek 1994). In more broader framework of the science on landscape it is a study "Landscape - thing or a process" (J. Urbánek 1992) and "Protection of landscape from the point of view of time-spatial structures" (J. Urbánek 1994).

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KRAJINA - VIZUÁLNA SKÚSEŇ S PRIESTOROM

Výskum krajiny naráža na jeden vážny a pretrvávajúci problém. Nejestvuje adekvátny, všeobecne akceptovaný pojem krajiny. Pritom sa tomuto teoretickému problému venovalo veľa pozornosti. Možno vraviť až o určitej hypertrofii teoretických úvah. Zdá sa, že geografi pritom zabudli na klasickú Aristotelovu definíciu pravdy, že pravda je "adequatio intellectus et rei", že pravdivosť pojmu možno overiť iba v jeho vzťahu k realite. S čím, s ktorou časťou reality máme konfrontovať pojem "krajina"? Ku ktorému predmetu referuje tento pojem? Tento na prvý pohľad triviálny problém však má svoju hĺbku a dôležitosť.

Na krajinu sa možno dívať, možno ju vidieť, nie však odvšadiaľ. Keď ju chceme vidieť, spontánne sa staviame na nejaké vyvýšené miesto, odkiaľ je "dobry rozhľad". Spontánnosť tohto aktu ľahko zakryje jeho zmysel. Výstupom získavame odstup od detailov. Detaily sa nestratia zo zorného poľa, ale prestanú v ňom dominovať. Zároveň sa v zornom poli ocitne diaľka v podobe všeobjímajúceho horizontu. Náš pohľad osciluje medzi

vzdialeným horizontom a detailami pri našom stanovišti. Táto elementárna vizuálna skúsenosť s krajinou patrí k univerzálnej ľudskej skúsenosti. Iba málo ľudí ju však dokázalo adekvátne vyjadriť. Mnohí to urobili tak dokonale, že za pestrou paletou zobrazených javov zreteľne presvitá fundamentálna štruktúra krajiny. Na niektorých obrazoch výrazne dominuje dial'ka. Detaily sa takmer nedostávajú do zorného poľa. Zobrazený priestor má povahu prázdna. Zároveň je stelesnením nehybnosti. Čo sa môže meniť na horizonte, na styku vzduchu, vody a pevného povrchu Zeme? Charakteristické je aj postavenie človeka v tomto nehybnom časopriestore. Individuálne črty ľudí sú úplne potlačené. V dial'ke nevidíme človeka - individuum, ale vidíme alebo skôr iba tušíme ľudstvo. Človek je v tomto veľkom až nehybnom časopriestore epifenoménom, javom okrajovým, existenčne ohrozeným. Kontinuálne, nehybné prázdno je fundamentálnou štruktúrou týchto obrazov.

Iná skupina obrazov zdôrazňuje popredie. Všetko - ľudia, rastliny, zvieratá, terén, voda, domy atď. - tu má zreteľné individuálne črty. Tento priestor je plný rozličných vecí, má charakter diskontinua. Časová dimenzia zobrazeného je nepatrná, všetko je tu efemérne. Obraz zachytáva nepatrný moment. Fundamentálnou štruktúrou obrazu je efemérna lokálna udalosť. V rámci nej má človek významné neraz až dominantné postavenie. Takmer všetko je tu poznamenané jeho prácou. Tu, na lokalite, nie je v postavení epifenoménu, ale v postavení hospodára. Ďalšia skupina obrazov rovnomerne znázorňuje predný, stredný i zadný plán. Priestor medzi popredím a pozadím obrazu, medzi lokalitou a dial'kou, nazveme krajinou. Ak v popredí vidíme stromy, tak v strednom pláne vidíme les. Túto vetu možno chápať doslovne i ako princíp. Ak vpredu vidieť detaily, potom v strednom pláne vidieť kompozície, celky. Vidíme nie zvieratá, ale stádo, nie budovu, ale obec, nie človeka, ale dedičanov a pod. Krajina má inú štruktúru ako dial'ka. Ak sa v dial'ke stýkajú základné sféry - voda, vzduch, zem - v podobe homogénnych od seba zreteľne oddelených útvarov, potom v krajine niet homogénneho priestoru. Je to pestrá priestorová mozaika zložená z rôznych sietí, v ktorých sa anorganické, organické a humánne javy tesne prelínajú. Krajine prislúcha i špecifický priestor. Je dynamickejší ako dial'ka, avšak rigidnejší ako lokalita. Strom odumiera, les však trvá, no nie absolútne. Opäť je to konkrétny príklad, ale i kompozičný princíp. Fundamentálna štruktúra krajiny je zdvojená. Vo vzťahu k dial'ke sa krajina javí ako vpád regionálnej autonómie do totality veľkých časopriestorových štruktúr. Vo vzťahu k lokalite sa krajina javí tiež ako mozaika, ale v inej funkcii. V tomto vzťahu sa javí ako anexia časopriestorovej autonómie lokality, jej bodovej efemérnosti do regionálnej časopriestorovej totality.

Táto štúdia vychádza z dosiaľ nevysloveného predpokladu. Je to predpoklad, že nejestvuje "bifurkácia prírody", že niet dichotómie medzi zmyslovou skúsenosťou s pojmom. To znamená, že načrtnutá vizuálna skúsenosť s krajinou môže slúžiť ako vstupná brána pri koncipovaní pojmu "krajina".

Obr. 1. Salomon van Ruisdael: Rýnska krajina.

Obr. 2. Jan van Goyen: Prievoz pri dedine.

Obr. 3. Pieter Bruegel: Poľovníci v snehu (január).

ERRATA

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