

The Evolution of the Concept of Landscape in German Linguistic Areas

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2.1.1 Introduction

Symbolic worlds of meaning – including ‘landscape’ – can be understood according to Berger and Luckmann (1966) as products of society. These are connected with history. In the German-speaking world, landscape, as such a symbolic world of meaning, has a large “semantic court” (Hard, 1969) of “associations, emotions and evocations” (Hard, 2002) as a result of its more than thousand-year evolution (for details see Müller, 1977; Piepmeier, 1980; Eisel, 1982; Kirchhoff and Trepl, 2009; Schenk, 2013). Because of this long history, the social construct landscape has been greatly stereotyped (see Kühne, 2008). The development of the scope of landscape in the German linguistic areas has some parallels to developments in other European languages (especially English, French and Dutch). It is also influenced by peculiarities, which had significant impact on the subject of the scientific understanding of landscape, worldwide. In this paper, important moments in the development of the German concept of landscape are presented.

2.1.2 Etymological origin and political regionalization

The first part of the word ‘Landschaft’, ‘Land’, has four dimensions of meaning: ‘Land’ as a state or legal territory, as the buildable surface of the earth, as the mainland (as opposed to sea) and, in German, as a contrast to the city to mean countryside (Schenk, 2013). In the Germanic languages the word landscape is one of the derivatives of the ‘-skapjan’ (‘-scapes’) words. These derivatives are characterized by a relatively uniform range of meanings. This includes the meanings of shape, form, texture, nature, condition and manner. The substantive ‘-scape-’ derivations describe something that belongs together. These related things are created through human activity (German: ‘schaffen’, English, ‘shape’; Haber, 2007).

The word ‘Lantscaf’ appeared in the early 9th Century (Gruenter, 1975). In Old High German, the word referred to something “that has the quality of a larger settlement area

in most cases” (Müller, 1977). As a designation of persons or groups of persons, it had a basic meaning of the usual behavior in an area and social norms of the residents living there. Landscape, however, was not defined by an exact delimitation or directly related to spatial units. In the following centuries, the meaning of the “social norms in one country” changed to the meaning of the “country where such norms are valid” (Müller, 1977). During the 12th century, this meaning was complemented by a political component. Landscape was conceived as a politically and legally defined space. This was a constitutive part of a larger political unit (Müller, 1977). In addition, the people of a region that had the right to political activity (not the farmers) were summarized as “representatives of the whole landscape” (Hard, 1977). In the High Middle Ages the concept of landscape included an area managed and controlled by a city (Müller, 1977). In the Late Middle Ages, the term ‘landscape’ referred to a precise expression of human laws and legal institutions (Olwig, 1996).

2.1.3 The constitution of the aesthetic landscape: from landscape painting to landscape as an aesthetic physical space

Artistic representation is an essential commonality of the European construction of landscape. However, the Western aesthetic construction of landscape was not a continuous development. The aesthetic design of spaces, as it was created in antiquity, was not continued in the Middle Ages: Instead of dealing with the mundane world, “the divine was to be expressed in works of visual art” (Büttner, 2006). Representations of spaces in paintings have, in this case, the function of the realization of the place of the action, such as water and riverbanks in Christopher representations (Erb, 1997). Also, the realm of eternal bliss was “not uncommon in the representation of a heavenly landscape” (Büttner, 2006). Paradise was often staged in front of a gold background. Not until the Renaissance was landscape painting developed as an independent discipline (Schenk, 2013). Thus, an essential form of social conception of the type of an ideal landscape was created, exemplified by the work of Claude Lorrain (Riedel, 1989).

In an effort to build on ancient traditions, “the trip to Italy became an integral part of the education of artists from north of the Alps” (Büttner, 2006). The landscapes, “patched-together in imaginary patterns in the studio” (Burckhardt, 2006), illustrate the creative process of “schaffen” (English: shaping; Olwig, 2008). Thus, the painting was the “pacemaker for our vision and our scenic experience” (Lehmann, 1968). The expectation induced by the painting was transferred to physical spaces. ‘Landscapes’ were ‘discovered’ in physical space as inspiration for landscape painting (Schenk, 2013). This meant the beginning of the reification of ‘landscape’. Thus, the expression ascribed to Alexander von Humboldt that the “total character of a part of the earth” (Hard, 1970) exceeds the visual-aesthetic aspects of landscape. The imputed ‘character’ of an area is no longer restricted to the aesthetic appearance.

In the societies of Central and Western Europe, the Renaissance was similarly fundamental to the social construction of landscape. In contrast, the Romanticism era was particularly intense in Germany. This happened as a result of opposition to the forced industrialization and the Enlightenment, and in a longing for unity in politically fragmented Germany. The Middle Ages were especially romanticized. Following the thought of Novalis, the castle was a symbol of “the search for the lost time in the mirror of one’s own childhood and that of the human race” (Safranski, 2007): a time, therefore, in which “faith and love had not yet been replaced by knowledge and possession” (Safranski, 2007). In the Romantic Era, landscape enjoyed “its highest appreciation” (Hohl, 1977). Mythological and historical content “extended the concept of ‘landscape’” (Hohl, 1977, see also Piepmeier, 1980). For the Romantic painters – particularly Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) – painting was no longer merely a question of artistic practice, “but one of the inner, moral and religious constitution of the artist” (Büttner, 2006). At the same time a literature was developed, which described land and people (as Droste-Hülshoff; Freigrath and Schücking). This literature made a significant contribution to regional and national education processes (Behschnitt, 2006): One’s own region or nation is described in terms of its natural and cultural characteristics, so that it becomes socially available as something diametrically opposed to other regions and nations (Lekan and Zeller, 2005). Thus the concept of landscape evolved into a medium of social criticism in the German Romantic and Biedermeier eras.

2.1.4 The contrast between city and countryside

Aestheticized scenic views were developed in particular by educated, mainly urban-dwelling people, in Europe. These educated city dwellers had the necessary economic and social distance from the rural spaces, where they located landscape (among many: Ritter, 1996). This distancing of the citizenry was due to the emancipation of rural space as a place of daily work in the field and from the threat of crop failure. For the urban dwellers, constructed landscape received a compensatory significance: Due to the organization of everyday life in the urban context, the need arose for an immediate confrontation with what was considered as natural (Ritter, 1996). Bätzing (2000) links the view of landscape with the social differentiation of industrialization. The world of industrialization was characterized by increasingly complex work processes and the emergence of different professions. But the world remained “at least on Sunday, at leisure, a holistic experience in the form of the ‘beautiful landscape’” (Bätzing, 2000). Landscape, understood as non-city, receives a connotation of freedom: “What drives the townspeople out of doors and into nature is merely to escape the social constraints, the social and spatial narrowness of the city” (Kaufmann, 2005). The romantic aestheticism and emotional attention to landscapes can be understood as a re-enchantment of nature, which was disenchanted by the Enlightenment. The aesthetically mediated construct of landscape beyond the city limits becomes the expression of good and true life in harmony with nature and the ‘natural’ social order. The idea of landscape was transferred into a conservative political program

through this anti-democratic perspective of the counter-Enlightenment and Romanticism (Körner and Eisel, 2006).

2.1.5 The transfer of scenic norms: Landscaping

Landscape was not only seen in physical spaces. With the spread of the English or landscape garden, physical spaces were redesigned based on the principles developed in landscape painting, even in Germany (see Apolinarski, Gailing, Röhring, 2006; Spanier, 2008). The French garden can be seen as a symbol for the rigidly defined society of absolutism in its geometric structure. The English garden, however, is associated with the idea of freedom (Bender, 1982). The English Garden is – in the sense of the Enlightenment – the symbol of “a better future society” (Burckhardt, 2006). In this society, people free themselves from the shackles of the absolutist order. The people reclaim their inherent fundamental rights (Olwig, 1995). The North American plants, often associated with landscaped gardens, experienced a special appreciation (Küster, 2009): “That which came from America was seen as a metaphor of freedom, especially after the Declaration of Independence of the United States.” The idealization of the English garden as an expression of the longing for harmony between man and nature (Spirn, 1998) is not devoid of irony: The nature of the English Garden is cultivated “in accordance with the vital needs of the people” (Seel, 1996). In Germany, the urge to transform physical space according to the ideas of an English landscape garden was implemented in the second half of the 18th Century by Franz of Anhalt-Dessau (1764–1800) with great consequence. As a follower of the Enlightenment, he sought to achieve a unity of aesthetics and economy following the English model (Hirsch, 1995). With the goal of contributing to the ethical and aesthetic education of the population, he planned to convert his entire principality into a garden kingdom (Haber, 2005).

2.1.6 Cultural landscape as home and landscape as an ecosystem

An essential component of the ‘semantic court’ of the current concept of landscape is introduced by the concept of cultural landscape. This concept, originally developed in the mid-19th century, goes back to the conservative folklorists and social theorist Wilhelm Riehl (1854). This construct postulates an inextricable link between people and landscape (Eisel, 1982; Lekan and Zeller, 2005; Körner and Eisel, 2006). Ernst Rudorff (1994 [1897]) picked up on this concept of a strong linkage of nature and culture in a cultural landscape and developed it further to a modern critical approach to local cultural heritage conservation (‘Heimatschutz’). Like the Romantics, he distanced himself from the abstract rational faith of the Enlightenment, the formal individualism of liberalism (‘everyone is equal under the law’) and the economic calculus of increasing efficiency in industry. He

developed a historical and political philosophy “of concrete reason and qualitatively richer individuality” (Körner, 2006), which led to the idea of ‘monadic places’, scenic wholes of individual physical-material space (of the earth’s surface) and cultures. The big city was the symbol of the loss of the cultural landscape rooted in the home. The city was considered a place of great egalitarianism, “in which people are jumbled together and there is no trace of nature” (Körner, 2006). He demanded testimonies of local history, in order to permanently root the people in their traditional cultural landscape. He also denounced the use of machinery in agriculture. Rudorff thereby founded an anti-modernist (and anti-urban) tradition (Knaut, 1993), which is characteristic for large parts of German nature conservation to this day. This concept of landscape can be described as essentialist. The basic idea of essentialism is the “assumption of the existence of essential and accidental properties of things” (Albert, 2005). The essence of the landscape is therefore essential, based on a regionally specific unit of culture and nature. Change, in the context of modernization, is regarded as accidental (see Kühne, 2013).

The comprehension of landscape as a concrete physical space with a separate nature as a result of a certain combination of culture and nature, typical for German landscape research, became a basic global understanding of landscape research. Therefore, it was Carl Otto Sauer who brought this understanding to Berkeley, from where it spread in the United States over Japan to China, where until now, traditional understandings of the relationship between man and space are being marginalized (Küchler and Wang, 2009; Ueda, 2013; Kühne, 2013).

With the unification of Social Darwinism and Nazism the cultural landscape ideal, originating from the local cultural heritage conservation (‘Heimatschutz’), was modified and abused to an exclusivist ideology: The conservative idea of the ‘unity of land and people’ had been reinterpreted with the ‘blood-and-soil’ theory and racism and technological euphoria used to propagate the expansionist ambitions of Nazi Germany. From this perspective, the ‘German cultural landscape’ has been interpreted as a reflection of the ‘superiority of the Nordic race’ (Trepl, 2012). Here, dichotomies were constructed between “‘German and fertile’ and the Slavic ‘desert’ or ‘wilderness’” (Blackbourn, 2007). This ‘wasteland’ concept was based on the idea that “these landscapes, created by Germans, had been neglected under Polish regime” (Fehn, 2007). Accordingly, the areas in the “wild east” were the subject of the fantasies of landscape architects, regional planners and politicians: Using technical superiority, these spaces should be transformed into ‘German cultural landscapes’ (Blackbourn, 2007; Fehn, 2007; Trepl 2012). “Undeniable affinities” (Blackbourn, 2007) about these excesses also existed between the local cultural heritage conservation (‘Heimatschutz’) in Germany and National Socialism. Both shared “an affect against big cities and ‘cold’ materialism, made unbridled liberal capitalism responsible for the threat to the beauty of the landscape and shared a whole series of spontaneous dislikes including being against concrete as a building material, which was declared as non-German, advertising posters, which blight the image of rural areas and the planting of alien trees and shrubs” (Blackbourn, 2007).

Even after the war, the conservative interpretation of patterns persisted in nature and heritage conservation movements. These were especially directed against Communism and lifestyles seen as American. However, this interpretation of landscape was in the 1950s and increasingly since the 1960s, in competition with a gradual greening and the rise of the importance of the natural scientific perspective (Blackbourn, 2007). The semantics of nature conservation has now been coined in place of protecting the homeland ('Heimat') by the protection of species, ecosystems and biological communities. The epistemological basis of the ecological approach is positivistic. Landscape is understood as an ecosystem-viewer-independent physical object with structures and functions, which can be captured through empirical methods and defined in a 'neutral' and 'objective' manner (King, 2002).

Positivist landscape research is based on the observation and abstraction of individual phenomena by the "inductive generalization of collected observations of the mind" (Eisel, 2009). The growing importance of the natural scientific perspective of nature conservation is occurring without the complete abandonment of the concepts of local cultural heritage conservation ('Heimatschutz'; Körner, 2005): "The specific diversity of species and habitats continue to play a central role in the assessment of habitat types" and for characteristic landscape features and the beauty seen therein. This dual approach is therefore contradictory: The construction of landscape as the synthesis of nature and culture was invented "merely as an alternative to science and, thus, rationally accessible nature" (Weber, 2007).

2.1.7 Landscape and post-industrialization

As shown, a romanticizing of the rural landscape took place during the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. In the time of transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society, a romanticizing of the industrial landscape has been demonstrated. Old industrial objects are, nowadays, symbols of a "simple, hard working class life" (Vicenzotti, 2005). This symbolic charge includes, on the one hand, following the evaluation scheme of the simple, hard and communitarian country life of the transition time from agrarian to industrial social order, on the other hand, it represents a response to the de-standardization and fragmentation of post-industrial society (Kühne, 2008). These traditional models of interpretation and aestheticization of the era of industrialization are again used and transformed. Old industrial urban landscapes "associate baroque ruin aesthetics with decaying blast furnaces and memories of the picturesque garden of the eighteenth century" (Hauser, 2004). In a romantic tradition, ruins symbolize doubts about the success of progress (Trigg, 2009). They are connected with elements of classic park design, as Chilla (2005) notes with the example of the Landscape Park Duisburg-Nord: "The park elements and diverse plants used alienate the old industrial heritage, add visual value, while at the same time making it usable for recreation." With the abandonment of the industrial uses of these objects, they undergo a connotative recoding whereby the former functions remain latent (see Dettmar, 2004; Bold, 2008).

The ability to aestheticize old industrial objects can be brought in connection with the extension of the concept of landscape in the German language area. No longer are rural cultural landscapes solely able to be understood as landscape. This extension of the landscape perspective (Apolinarski, Gailing, Röhring, 2006) to include the urban can be interpreted as a connection of German landscape research to the international debate, which has often discussed the idea of vernacular landscapes. Also, in terms of the theoretical consideration of landscape, German-speaking landscape research is beginning to approach the Anglo-Saxon. Increasingly, constructionist perspectives are also being taken into the German research. Its basic position lies in the recognition that landscape is not an awareness of an external, analytically determinable object (as in positivist understandings) or an organism with its own essence (as with essentialist understandings), but a socially produced and mediated construct (among many: Kühne, 2008; Wojtkiewicz and Heiland, 2012; Kost, 2013; Schönwald, 2013). This construct in the German language is the result of the development process of the concept of landscape, described here. With an opening to the constructivist perspective, German landscape research is now also sensitive to questions of power (Bruns, 2006; Kühne, 2008).

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