A FIGUREREOUR TOUR OF LANDSCAPE SOCIOLOGY (1)
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Landscape has stirred little more than casual interest among sociologists during the last fifteen years in France but the mere fact that attempts to think about landscape in sociological terms have been made stands out as a picturesque landmark in the realms of ideas. Ever since W. Glynk's descriptions of British scenery (2) gave rise to picturesque attitudes in sketching and touring we have learnt that changing approaches to landscape cannot usually be divorced from changing uses of the environment or from environmental change itself (3).

Landscape has such rich meaning in common language that sociologists in France have refrained until very recently from using the word altogether. Such unassailability is quite obvious in K. Ledrut's Images of the City (4) where he systematically avoids characterising the city as landscape even though he acknowledges that citizens were using the word during their interviews. But this is not the only reason. Landscape belonged to geography. Here was the rule The intellectual division of labor that has been brought about by the establishment of academic disciplines among the humanities has set apart geography (close to natural sciences) and history (close to social sciences: sociology, demography, political science). Interest in space or environment was taken to mean disinterest for the notion of time, to justify for a choice in favor of technocratic thinking as opposed to critical thinking. At most one could indulge in studying social uses of space.

Following upon Pierre Bourdieu's steps (5) Bernard Kaloza (6) has approached social uses of landscape through a study of social uses of Fontainebleau forest (7) an outstanding feature of the Paris region. First he asked how does the visitors' social structure compare with the overall Paris region population. This showed a clear social imbalance: the richer or the more educated people, the more numerous among visitors in Fontainebleau. Of course Fontainebleau forest is very well known for its picturesque landscapes but so is it also for its rock climbing and for picnicking facilities. So that visiting the forest or walking along its footpath cannot be readily equated with appreciating the landscape. A further inquiry through interviews of a sample of visitors enabled him to find out that a minority of them did in fact appreciate the landscape, and that the social structure of its constituency was even moreลง กล้า than the visitors' as a whole. Yet this investigation raised two further questions: what does landscape mean to them? how did such cultural differences with respect to forest uses between different social groups come about?

In order to answer these questions he turned to a genealogical approach of the development of culture (8) and showed how a pattern of attitudes towards the environment had been established by landscape painters in the second third of the 19th century (9). This pattern was further used by a
state forest manager to improve the forest environment in order to change the attitudes of visitors and to make them more conversant with the painters (10). This has developed over time into the establishment of Fontainebleau forest as an outstanding landscape scenery (11) well known to a cultivated elite which is recruited mostly among the well-to-do and the highly educated members of French society.

Such an approach shows actually how a powerful social group has succeeded during the 19th century in gaining public recognition for capital improvement and management of the forest along its own cultural lines. It suggests forcibly that different social groups might have different attitudes with respect to man-environment relationships (12). Hence sociologists have been cautioned not to take unwittingly sides with a social group the culture of which they share. It was even suggested that landscape definition should belong to the landscape producers themselves, that is, in the countryside, to the farming communities (13).

This trend of ideas has spurred a small number of sociological investigations that were trying to unravel landscape production processes in the countryside (14), and in rural communes colonized by city dwellers searching for leisure amenities (15), and even in the city of Marsailles (16). It turned out that this process by itself had greater significance for most social actors than its outcome, landscape itself. Because it implied a meaning-making activity through which a social group expressed its identity, or its search for an identity (17). So, landscape, territory and cultural identity came to be a cluster of narrowly linked concepts in sociological reports.

At any given time a place may be inhabited by several groups which are sharing a few amenities, competing for a few others and even struggling towards different relationships between men and their environment (18). Such attitudes contribute to shaping the world and building up territories and sense of place as well as sense of group identity. But such processes may result from a variety of social processes. Many individuals creating a personal place for their family, their kin, or their business may unwittingly contribute to the creation of a new landscape; social groups competing for some control over larger changes in the local society may find it convenient to take an ideological stance on landscape; still other social groups may be competing for conflicting models of environment-use and land-use, to be followed in the future: conflicts about nature actually (19). Local debates on such matters are mitigated by social compromise and inertia of environmental change. Social domination by itself would mold any local landscape according to some exogenous references assigning its shape meaning and social uses according to a single pattern: let us call such a process, monotypical, that is making a place into a monument. Yet it is constantly kept in check by a whole variety of processes arising from local initiatives imprinting the 'firm' (20) of diverse social groups upon the environment. We may call this territoriality. Then it makes sense to understand landscape as the outcome of dialectical relationships between monotypical and territoriality (21).

Much remains to be done in order to describe such processes but it still begs a question: where are the mental schemas coming from which are
commonly followed by actors in the production of landscape, whether aiming at monumentality or territoriosity?

Many researchers have convincingly argued that picturesque attitudes promoting travel as an aesthetic pursuit among the well-to-do classes during the 19th century have been highly influential in promoting an interest in visual improvement of local landscapes (22). It has followed a different fate according to the social dynamics of territoriosity and monumentality, so that landscape value has been distributed over the countryside in a fairly uneven manner. Such differences have been reflected in further differences in environmental management in order to attract a growing number of tourists, so that landscape value has led to landscape transfiguration.

Yet such a visual appreciation of landscape, derived from painting appreciation and sketch practice in a culturally elitist society has been giving way during the last century, at least, to a fairly different approach. Visual literacy is still very important, but instead of deriving pleasure only from a well balanced pictorial view, a panorama to use an early 19th century phrase, it calls for selecting a few limited cues in a view that afford the spectator an interpretation of the sense of place from an historical, cultural or scientific point of view. Industrial museums for instance as well as folk culture museums introduce visitors to a discovery of landscape that emulates the kind of aesthetic education that collection of landscape prints had been providing its XVIIth century audience although it is a totally new vein. Instead of introducing the visual discovery of countryside qua landscape it invites the reconstruction of socialities of the past from a reconstruction of the present visual appearance of cities and countryside alike, and singling out of the most symbolic cues. We have called this the palimpsest model: deciphering the various situations written one after another onto a single place of parchment (23). This is clearly exemplified in the manuals for environmental discovery in the national parks, the historical footpath (24) or the cities and regions themselves: landscape is a source for an infinite number of human cultures that have been describing or shaping a place. It is becoming a general symbol for human activities and as such it evades any finite number of meanings that can be attached to it nowadays (23). Yet it tends to become a particular kind of symbol expressing the contradiction within contemporary cultures between the striving for universality of each culture alike, and the almost universal acknowledgment of the need for cultural plurality.

This shows clearly that the analysis of landscape cannot rest any longer with dual research approaches calling on the one hand upon an objective description of landscape to be provided by earth scientists and geographers, and on the other hand upon a study of representations called from environmental psychology or aesthetic theory. Augustin Berque (26) has challenged such a simplistic division of research labor in his own studies of the Japanese landscape and he has proposed to adopt a radial point of view that calls forth a study of the relationship between society, space and nature he calls milieu in a not too unfamiliar way and introduces to the study of both its ecological and symbolic character and meaning which he calls eclecticism (27). This is a dynamic concept since men derive
some symbolic meaning from their ecological surroundings and contribute accordingly to its ecological modelling. Man-environment relationship is an on-going process of change. A. Barque calls it trajectory. Hence he stresses the importance of the embeddedness of material, practical and symbolic changes that seem to evade our attention when studying landscape. It seems an tempting to look at the countryside as if it were possible to behold an everlasting landscape with an appreciating eye! The present interest in a more dynamic attitude, deciphering past social meaning-making that has shaped the landscape demands that researchers start paying attention to trajectory.

NOTES

1. This paper is a follow-up of a larger survey presented at the "Colloque Franco-Japonais sur le Ressentir Paysager" organized by M. Augustin Barque at the Musée Frango-Japonais (n° 5, 2 cheme, Bouquetin, Kanto, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo), October 1987.


7. In a large extent a plane comparable to New Forest for its historical and cultural significance in the development of a picturesque appreciation of landscapes in France and Great Britain. Cf. OLDFIELD, W., A picturesque tour of New Forest.

8. He took his inspiration from the genealogical methodology used by Foucault in Surveiller et punir, Paris.

9. Augustin Barque calls such patterns "production", suggesting a new conceptual approach for geographical analysis of landscapes which seems very promising. We shall not use it in this text just as we might suggest an anthropological description of the actual development of ideas. Nevertheless we think that Barque's concepts offer a very interesting alternative to common language usage. We shall perhaps make the case for a few more concepts. Cf. BARDER, Augustin (1985) Le Sourire et l'Artifice. Les Japonais devant la nature. Paris, Gallimard (1987) Urban Landscapes as an expressive process, in Colloque Franco-Japonais sur le Ressentir Paysager, op. cit.

10. Such an approach reaching for changes in the pattern of relationship between persons and place can be called after Augustin Barque a "sociological" theme.

11. We may also have an instance of the kind that the Japanese call "motetsu" : seeing Fontainebleau forest as if it were a British landscape (called in Japanese a "matsukura"), in such a way that the memory of the original "motetsu" is fading away. It is worth noting that the "esteticisation" process that has been carefully analyzed and illustrated by Alan Rogers in "Le art et Paysager" (1977, Aubiac, Paris) has been found not to be very important in the formation of landscapes appreciation in Japan. Cf. HARA, Tetsu (1981) Landscape appreciation in Japanese Poetry, in Colloque France-Japonaise sur le rassentir paysager, op. cit.; and MARSH, Toshio "The Japanese perception of nature - a feeling of affinity for the four seasons", in Look Japan, July 18th, 1983. Yet the aesthetic traditions involve major cultural differences that are not accounted for. Cross cultural analysis could be extremely valuable on such a topic. Cf. Alan ROSSER, Alan (1985) Land and Landscapes - archetypes and patterns, in Colloque France-Japonaise sur le rassentir paysager, op. cit.

12. In Augustin Barque's term we would say more briefly that we may witness conflicting trajectory schemes heralded by uniquely modernized social groups.