"The Word Itself"
from
Discovering the
Vernacular Landscape
by J.B. Jackson

Why is it, I wonder, that we have trouble agreeing on the meaning of landscape? The word is simple enough, and it refers to something which we think we understand; and yet to each of us it seems to mean something different.

What we need is a new definition. The one we find in most dictionaries is more than three hundred years old and was drawn up for artists. It tells us that a landscape is a "portion of land which the eye can comprehend at a glance." Actually when it was first introduced (or reintroduced) into English it did not mean the view itself, it meant a picture of it, an artist's interpretation. It was his task to take the forms and colors and spaces in front of him—mountains, river, forest, fields, and so on—and compose them so that they made a work of art.

There is no need to tell in detail how the word gradually changed in meaning. First it meant a picture of a view; then the view itself. We went into the country and discovered beautiful views, always remembering the criteria of landscape beauty as established by critics and artists. Finally, on a modest scale, we undertook to make over a piece of ground so that it resembled a pastoral landscape in the shape of a garden or park. Just as the painter used his judgment as to what to include or omit in his composition, the landscape gardener (as he was known in the eighteenth century) took pains to produce a stylized "picturesque" landscape, leaving out the muddy roads, the plowed fields, the squalid villages of the real countryside and including certain agreeable natural features: brooks and groves of trees and smooth expanses of grass. The results were often extremely beautiful, but they were still pictures, though in three dimensions.

The reliance on the artist's point of view and his definition of landscape beauty persisted throughout the nineteenth century. Olmsted and his followers designed their parks and gardens in "painterly" terms. "Although three-dimensional composition in landscape materials differs from two-dimensional landscape painting, because a garden or park design contains a series of pictorial compositions," the Encyclopaedia Britannica (13th edition) informs us, "... nevertheless in each of these pictures we find the familiar basic principles of unity, of repetition, of sequence and balance, of harmony and contrast." But within the last half century a revolution has taken place: landscape design and landscape painting have gone their separate ways. Landscape architects no longer turn to Poussin or Salvador Rosa or Gilpin for inspiration; they may not even have heard of their work. Knowledge of ecology and conservation and environmental psychology are now part of the landscape architect's professional background, and protecting and "managing" the natural environment are seen as more important than the designing of picturesque parks. Environmental designers, I have noticed, avoid the word landscape and prefer land or terrain or environment or even space when
they have a specific site in mind. Landscape is used for suggesting the esthetic quality of the wider countryside.

As for painters, they have long since lost interest in producing conventional landscapes. Kenneth Clark, in his book Landscape Into Painting, comments on this fact. "The microscope and telescope have so greatly enlarged the range of our vision," he writes, "that the snug, sensible nature which we can see with our own eyes has ceased to satisfy our imaginations. We know that by our new standards of measurement the most extensive landscape is practically the same as the hole through which the burrowing ant escapes from our sight."

This does not strike me as a very satisfactory explanation of the demise of traditional landscape painting. More than a change in scale was responsible. Painters have learned to see the environment in a new and more subjective manner: as a different kind of experience. But that is not the point. The point is, the two disciplines which once had a monopoly on the word—landscape architecture and landscape painting—have ceased to use it the way they did a few decades ago, and it has now reverted as it were to the public domain.

What has happened to the word in the meantime? For one thing we are using it with much more freedom. We no longer bother with its literal meaning—which I will come to later—and we have coined a number of words similar to it: roadscape, townscape, cityscape, as if the syllable scape meant a space, which it does not; and we speak of the wilderness landscape, the lunar landscape, even of the landscape at the bottom of the ocean. Furthermore the word is frequently used in critical writing as a kind of metaphor. Thus we find mention of the "landscape of a poet's image," the "landscape of dreams," or "landscape as antagonist" or "the landscape of thought," or, on quite a different level, the "political landscape of the NATO conference," the "patronage landscape." Our first reaction to these usages is that they are farfetched and pretentious. Yet they remind us of an important truth: that we always need a word or phrase to indicate a kind of environment or setting which can give vividness to a thought or event or relationship; a background placing it in the world. In this sense landscape serves the same useful purpose as do the words climate or atmosphere, used metaphorically. In fact landscape when used as a painter's term often meant "all that part of a picture which is not of the body or argument"—like the stormy array of clouds in a battle scene or the glimpse of the Capitol in a presidential portrait.

In the eighteenth century, landscape indicated scenery in the theater and had the function of discreetly suggesting the location of the action or perhaps the time of day. As I have suggested elsewhere, there is no better indication of how our relation to the environment can change over the centuries than in the role of stage scenery. Three hundred years ago Corneille could write a five-act tragedy with a single indication of the setting: "The action takes place in the palace of the king." If we glance at the work of a modern playwright we will probably find one detailed description of a scene after another, and the ultimate in this kind of landscape, I suppose, is the contemporary movie. Here the set does much more than merely identify the time and place and establish the mood. By means of shifts in lighting and sound and perspective the set actually creates the players, identifies them, and tells them what to do: a good example of environmental determinism.

But these scenic devices and theater landscapes are mere imitations of real ones: easily understood by almost everyone, and shared. What I object to is the fallacy in the metaphorical use of the word. No one denies that as our thoughts become complex and abstract we need metaphors to give them a degree of reality. No one denies that as we become uncertain of our status we need more and more reenforcement from our environment. But we should not use the word landscape to describe our private world, our private microcosm, and for a simple reason: a landscape is a concrete, three-dimensional shared reality.

Lands and Shapes

Landscape is a space on the surface of the earth; intuitively we know that it is a space with a degree of permanence, with its own distinct character, either topographical or cultural, and above all a space shared by a group of people; and when we go beyond the dictionary definition of landscape and examine the word itself we find that our intuition is correct.

Landscape is a compound, and its components hark back to that ancient Indo-European idiom, brought out of Asia by migrating peoples thousands of years ago, that became the basis of almost all modern European languages—Latin and Celtic and Germanic and Slavic and Greek. The word was introduced into Britain sometime after the fifth century A.D. by the Angles and Saxons and Jutes and Danes and other groups of Germanic speech. In addition to its Old English variations—landskipe, landscape, and others—there is the German landschaft, the Dutch landschap, as well as Danish and Swedish equivalents. They all come from the same roots, but they are not always used in the English sense. A German landschaft, for instance, can sometimes be a small administrative unit, corresponding in size to our ward. I have the feeling that there is evolving a slight but noticeable difference between the way we Americans use the word and the way the English do. We tend to think that landscape can mean natural scenery only, whereas in England a landscape almost always contains a human element.

The equivalent word in Latin languages derives in almost every case from the Latin pagus—meaning a defined rural district. The French, in fact, have several words for landscape, each with shades of meaning: terroir, pays,
payage, campagne. In England the distinction was once made between two kinds of landscape: woodland and champ—-the latter deriving from the French champagne, meaning a countryside of fields.

That first syllable, land, has had a varied career. By the time it reached England it signified earth and soil as well as a portion of the surface of the globe. But a much earlier Gothic meaning was plowed field. Grimm’s monumental dictionary of the German language says that “land originally signified the plot of ground or the furrows in a field that were annually rotated” or redistributed. We can assume that in the Dark Ages the most common use of the word indicated any well-defined portion of the earth’s surface. A small farm plot was a land, and so was a sovereign territory like England or Scotland; any area with recognized boundaries was a land. Despite almost two thousand years of reinterpretation by geographers and poets and ecologists, land in American law remains stubbornly true to that ancient meaning: “any definite site regarded as a portion of the earth’s surface, and extending in both vertical directions as defined by law” (italics added).

Perhaps because of this definition farmers think of land not only in terms of soil and topography but in terms of spatial measurements, as a defined portion of a wider area. In the American South, and in England too, a “land” is a subdivision of a field, a broad row made by plowing or mowing, and horse-drawn mowers were once advertised as “making a land of so-and-so many feet.” In Yorkshire the reapers of wheat take a “land” (generally six feet wide) and go down the length of the field. “A woman,” says the English Dialect Dictionary, “would thus reap half an acre a day and a man an acre.” In his book on English field systems, Gray mentions a typical medieval village where the two large, open fields “consisted of about two thousand long narrow ‘lands’ or selions [furrows] each containing usually from one fourth of an acre to an acre.”

This is very confusing, and even more confusing is the fact that to this day in Scotland a land means a building divided into houses or flats. I confess that I find this particular use of the word hard to decipher, except that in Gaelic the word lann means an enclosed space. Finally, here is an example—if it can be called that—of land meaning both a fraction of a larger space and an enclosed space: infantrymen know that a land is an interval between the grooves of a rifle bore.

I need not press the point. As far back as we can trace the word, land meant a defined space, one with boundaries, though not necessarily one with fences or walls. The word has so many derivative meanings that it rivals in ambiguity the word landscape. Three centuries ago it was still being used in everyday speech to signify a fraction of plowed ground no larger than a quarter acre, then to signify an expanse of village holdings, as in grassland or woodland, and then finally to signify England itself—the largest space any Englishman of those days could imagine; in short, a remarkably versatile word, but always implying a space defined by people, and one that could be described in legal terms.

This brings us to that second syllable: scape. It is essentially the same as shape, except that it once meant a composition of similar objects, as when we speak of a fellowship or a membership. The meaning is clearer in a related word: sheaf—a bundle or collection of similar stalks or plants. Old English, or Anglo-Saxon, seems to have contained several compound words using the second syllable—scape or its equivalent—to indicate collective aspects of the environment. It is much as if the words had been coined when people began to see the complexities of the man-made world. Thus housescape meant what we would now call a household, and a word of the same sort which we still use—township—once meant a collection of “tuns” or farmsteads.

Taken apart in this manner, landscape appears to be an easily understood word: a collection of lands. But both syllables once had several distinct, now forgotten meanings, and this should alert us to the fact that familiar monosyllables in English—house, town, land, field, home—can be very shifting despite their coiled sound. Scape is an instance. An English document of the tenth century mentions the destruction of what it called a “waterscape.” What could that have been? We might logically suppose that it was the liquid equivalent of a landscape, an ornamental arrangement, perhaps, of ponds and brooks and waterfalls, the creation of some Anglo-Saxon predecessor of Olmsted’s. But it was actually something entirely different. The waterscape in question was a system of pipes and drains and aqueducts serving a residence and a mill.

From this piece of information we can learn two things. First, that our Dark Age forebears possessed skills which we probably did not credit them with, and second, that the word scape could also indicate something like an organization or a system. And why not? If housescape meant the organization of the personnel of a house, if township eventually came to mean an administrative unit, then landscape could well have meant something like an organization, a system of rural farm spaces. At all events it is clear that a thousand years ago the word had nothing to do with scenery or the depiction of scenery.

We pull up the word landscape by its Indo-European roots in an attempt to gain some insight into its basic meaning, and at first glance the results seem disappointing. Aside from the fact that as originally used the word dealt only with a small fraction of the rural environment, it seems to contain not a hint of the aesthetic and emotional associations which the word still has for us. Little is to be gained by searching for some etymological link between our own rich landscape and the small cluster of plowed fields of more than a thousand years ago.

Nevertheless the formula landscape as a composition of man-made spaces on the land is more significant than it first appears, for if it does not provide us with
a definition it throws a revealing light on the origin of the concept. For it says that a landscape is not a natural feature of the environment but a synthetic space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land, functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community—for the collective character of the landscape is one thing that all generations and all points of view have agreed upon. A landscape is thus a space deliberately created to speed up or slow down the process of nature. As Eliade expresses it, it represents man taking upon himself the role of time.

A very successful undertaking on the whole, and the proof, paradoxically enough, is that many if not most of these synthetic organizations of space have been so well assimilated into the natural environment that they are indistinguishable and unrecognized for what they are. The reclamation of Holland, of the Fens, or large portions of the Po Valley are familiar examples of a topographical intervention producing new landscapes. Less well known are the synthetic landscapes produced simply by spatial reorganization. Historians are said to be blind to the spatial dimension of history, which is probably why we hear so little about the wholesale making of agricultural landscapes throughout seventeenth-century Europe.

It is not a coincidence that much of this landscape creation took place during a period when the greatest gardens and parks and the most magnificent of city complexes were being designed. A narrow and pedantic taxonomy has persuaded us that there is little or nothing in common between what used to be called civil engineering and garden or landscape architecture, but in fact from an historical perspective their more successful accomplishments are identical in result. The two professions may work for different patrons, but they both reorganize space for human needs, both produce works of art in the truest sense of the term. In the contemporary world it is by recognizing this similarity of purpose that we will eventually formulate a new definition of landscape: a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence; and if background seems inappropriately modest we should remember that in our modern use of the word it means that which underscores not only our identity and presence, but also our history.

It is not for me to attempt to elaborate on this new definition. My contribution would in any event be peripheral, for my interest in the topic is confined to trying to see how certain organizations of space can be identified with certain social and religious attitudes, especially here in America. This is not a new approach, for it has long been common among architectural and landscape architectural historians; and it leaves many important aspects of the contemporary landscape and contemporary city entirely unexplored. But it has the virtue of including the visual experience of our everyday world and of allowing me to remain loyal to that old-fashioned but surprisingly persistent definition of landscape: "A portion of the earth's surface that can be comprehended at a glance."
Those of us who undertake to study landscapes in a serious way soon come up against a sobering truth: even the simplest, least interesting landscape often contains elements which we are quite unable to explain, mysteries that fit into no known pattern. But we also eventually learn that every landscape, no matter how exotic, also contains elements which we at once recognize and understand. We may be baffled by the layout of the towns and the crops the people raise, and the architecture may be unlike anything we have encountered, but the fields and fences and houses, for instance, are easy to understand; we have only to look at them once to see the role they play.

It is with such commonplace elements that we should begin our study. The unique features can be taken care of later. The familiar serves as a point of departure; it reassures us that however strange the landscape may appear to be, it is not entirely alien and is related to every other landscape. Human nature satisfies its needs in many ways, but the needs are everywhere essentially the same.

Human nature is a risky topic to discuss, and not a few persons will maintain that no such thing exists. Yet there are some assumptions about the universality of human behavior that are so obvious that we accept them without question. One of them is that none of us, no matter how self-reliant we may be, can survive alone for any extended length of time. How long that time can be is something we really do not know, and I daresay it is one of the things about human nature that we have yet to learn. Nevertheless there is a limit. There comes a moment when we begin to suffer, psychologically and even physically, for the companionship and presence of others. Ethologists and others who study animal behavior and know much about the gregarious or social characteristics of birds and animals and fish and even of insects, tell how they respond to the presence of others of their kind and seem to languish when they are alone too long. So we are not unique in this respect; but we are much more demanding. The mere presence of other bodies is not enough. We have the need for sustained discourse, for the exchange of ideas and, what is no less essential, for disagreement, since both kinds of communication lead to a sharpened sense of our identity. That is why gregariousness never suffices; that is why we are not content until our social instincts are given form and even a kind of visibility. We are what Aristotle called political animals; animals, that is to say, having the power of speech, which enables us to debate such matters as good and evil, justice and injustice, and how to act to achieve a good life.

Yes. But what complicates our identity is the fact that we are also inhabitants of the earth, involved in the natural order and in a sense even part of it. This means that we have to spend time and thought and energy on providing ourselves with shelter and food and clothing and a degree of security. We have to come to terms with nature if we are to survive. We have to understand nature and feel at home with it if we are to be true inhabitants of the earth.
It is a romantic error to suppose that this experience should be solitary. If we hunt, if we farm, even if we botanize, we are benefiting from and sharing in the accumulated experience of others, so this other identity of ours also has its social implications. It implies that we recognize other people as inhabitants of the earth as well as members of a social order. It is the interaction of these two very different and sometimes contradictory definitions of man that produces a landscape—an environment modified by the permanent presence of a group. No group sets out to create a landscape, of course. What it sets out to do is to create a community, and the landscape as its visible manifestation is simply the by-product of people working and living, sometimes coming together, sometimes staying apart, but always recognizing their interdependence.

There is invariably tension between the two points of view, the two identities, always debate as to which is the more important, and we do well to recognize that this tension is not confined to the group; it is also within each of us. None of us is ever entirely political animal or entirely inhabitant; we are unpredictable mixtures of the two. We enjoy the dense vitality of the city only to complain that there are not enough green spaces where we can be alone with nature. To live close to nature in the open country is a wholesome experience—if only there were more political coming together!

It follows that no landscape can be exclusively devoted to the fostering of only one identity. Our imaginative literature abounds in descriptions of utopias where everyone is civic-minded, and there are many descriptions of the delights of living in harmony with nature as certain pretechnological societies presumably did. But we sense that these visions are not true to human nature as we know it, and that these landscapes can never be realized; and that is why many of us find utopian speculations unprofitable.

Still, we cannot expect any landscape to be a perfect blend of the two points of view. One of them is always favored over the other, and an interesting aspect of landscape history is how the two can alternate. This process is well illustrated in our own American landscape history, and it is in order to understand that history that I am enumerating some of the simplest and most visible elements in what can be called the political landscape: the landscape which evolved partly out of experience, partly from design, to meet some of the needs of men and women in their political guise. The political elements I have in mind are such things as walls and boundaries and highways and monuments and public places; these have a definite role to play in the landscape. They exist to insure order and security and continuity and to give citizens a visible status. They serve to remind us of our rights and obligations and of our history.

Elements such as these are what every society is likely to value, and every landscape, whatever its complexion, will contain some of them. Nevertheless there are certain historical landscapes where they are especially numerous.

Fifth-century Greece is the best-known example of a political landscape. The writings of Plato and Aristotle, the legislation of Solon and Cleisthenes provide us with the earliest descriptions of such a landscape and how it was brought into being. Republican Rome also had its political landscape and so did seventeenth-century France, and one of the most extensive as well as one of the most familiar examples is our own American landscape as first laid out in the early nineteenth century. Many more could be cited: ancient China and ancient Japan produced impressive political landscapes, and the Communist countries are doubtless producing them now. On the other hand, the landscapes of medieval Europe and of many Moslem countries seem to have contained comparatively few political elements, and I think it could be said that in the contemporary United States they are less conspicuous than they were a century and a half ago.

That, however, is something we can ascertain only by studying the political landscape of the past in greater detail.

**Boundaries**

The most basic political element in any landscape is the boundary. Politically speaking what matters first is the formation of a community of responsible citizens, a well-defined territory composed of small holdings and a number of public spaces; so the first step toward organizing space is the defining of that territory, after which we divide it for the individual members. Boundaries, therefore, unmistakable, permanent, inviolate boundaries, are essential.

We would all agree that insofar as every landscape is a composition of spaces it is also a composition or web of boundaries. But here we must be cautious, for boundaries can serve a variety of functions. In the contemporary Western world we assume that a boundary is the point (or line) of contact between two defined spaces, a way of regulating contact and communication with neighbors, even while it protects us against invasion or unwanted entry. We assume—and rightly from our point of view—that the boundary is like a skin: a thin surface which is in fact part of the body, part of space which it protects. We therefore assume that the boundary corresponds as closely as possible to the area of the content. That is why we have spent so much time and thought establishing natural or functional boundaries for every kind of space, boundaries which faithfully delimit a homogeneous unit. In geographical terms we try to discover a forest or a range of hills which will divide one area or region from another, or to locate the line marking a difference in language or religion or ethnic stock. Planners and sociologists are not less concerned with establishing the boundaries of economic or social territories, and so we have boundaries based on the circulation of newspapers or the drawing capacity of a shopping center. In every case we try to establish a boundary closely adjusted to its social or natural content, and back of this
effort is the notion that the space (or the way the space is used) is an essential characteristic of the contents. A nation, we say, is not simply a collection of people, it is also the territory they occupy, and the boundary in consequence should be drawn so that the two entities correspond as closely as possible.

This may seem obvious, but there is reason to believe that the traditional political landscape had a very different concept of a boundary: it was intended less to define a region and establish an effective relationship with the outside world than to isolate and protect something within it. It was not so much a skin as it was a packaging, an envelope.

Therefore the boundary in a political landscape often bears little relationship to the society within it, and a good illustration of this can be seen in the United States. In the nineteenth century we created a number of states which were in effect immense rectangular spaces having no relation to topography or population. In the beginning a few thousand settlers constituted the entire population of an area the size of a European kingdom.

In those politically minded times, no one protested the incongruity. What mattered was that a territory was established in which certain political institutions could begin to function without outside interference.

A typical man-made space in a political landscape, whether farm or village or nation, is likely to contain near its center an isolated, independent structure surrounded by a buffer zone and a very visible boundary, and communication between this structure (or collection of structures) and the outside world is formalized in some manner: by a portal or gate or architectural entrance way. As we might expect, this kind of protective, isolating boundary was common in ancient Greece.

In his book on the Classical city, Fustel de Coulanges describes how the center of the farmstead, the sacred hearth, was surrounded by such a buffer zone. “The sacred fire must be isolated—that is to say, completely separated from all that is not itself. . . . There must be an enclosure around this hearth at a certain distance.” At a later period when dwellings were of necessity brought closer together in towns and cities, the sacred enclosure persisted in the form of a low wall, a ditch, or even a mere open space a few feet wide. “At Rome the law fixed two feet and a half as the width of the open space which was always to separate two houses, and this space was consecrated to the god of the enclosure.”

Even the city states of Classical Greece possessed boundaries meant to isolate and protect, and when possible to prevent contact. Topographical features—mountains or rivers—rarely served as barriers, but it was generally agreed that each territory or landscape should be isolated. Thucydides tells how “Athens accused the Megarians of pushing their cultivation into the consecrated and unenclosed land on the border” between the two; and that violation triggered the Peloponnesian war.

The Roman Limes was not an international boundary in the modern sense. It was a long, continuous, fortified zone of some width that represented not a division between two military powers but simply the outermost limits of Roman influence; it was the rejection of contact. “This unduly praised frontier,” says Toynbee, “really registered nothing but the undesigned and accidental locus of the geographical line along which two conflicting social forces had come into a transitory equilibrium.”

In a greatly modified form, our early American landscape displayed much the same attitude toward boundaries: they were designed to isolate and protect the objects or people within them. The device persisted longest, I think, in the siting of important buildings: the freestanding church, the freestanding courthouse, the freestanding school or college building—all of them edifices of some sanctity—relied on an enclosing-and-excluding-fence or wall and a surrounding buffer zone of empty space to give them dignity and aloofness. We are grateful that they did, for the result was almost always a composition of great effectiveness. But it is we who have learned to perceive that composition; the classical building of white clapboard or brick in the midst of smooth, green lawn and towering trees, fenced off from the secular world is in our eyes a single harmonious unit. Yet I cannot help feel that when those structures were built they were in no way seen as related to the open space encompassing them. That space was merely the protective envelope or packaging, and the fence or wall was merely the ultimate legal symbol of autonomy.

We have outgrown this protective or exclusionary concept of the boundary, and generally speaking the linear boundary, duly surveyed, registered, and indicated on the landscape is the one we prefer. We are all familiar with Frost’s poem “Mending Wall,” in which a farmer insists on mending the wall between his property and that of his neighbor, even though neither landowner has any livestock. “Good fences make good neighbors,” he keeps saying. Frost comments: “He moves in darkness as it seems to me, / Not of woods only and the shade of trees. / He will not go behind his father’s saying, / And he likes having thought of it so well / He says again, ‘Good fences make good neighbors.’”

He is right to this extent: boundaries stabilize social relationships. They make residents out of the homeless, neighbors out of strangers, strangers out of enemies. They give a permanent human quality to what would otherwise be an amorphous stretch of land. Those roughly geometrical enclosed spaces are a way of rebuking the disorder and shapelessness of the natural environment; seeing them from outside, the alien wanderer wishes he too belonged. It is when we find ourselves in a landscape of well-built, well-maintained fences and hedges and walls, whether in New England or Europe or Mexico, that we realize we are in a landscape where political identity is a matter of importance, a landscape where lawyers make a good living and everyone knows how much land he owns.
But the reliance on the linear boundary is relatively new. Not until the very end of the eighteenth century was the first linear national boundary—that of France—officially established and inscribed on maps; at much the same time that in America we were designing whole landscapes with accurately defined linear boundaries when we passed the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. Boundaries, especially boundaries sanctified by law, are hard to obliterate, and our national grid system, the triumph of geometry over topography, will be with us till the end of time. Nevertheless there are signs that we are growing tired of linear boundaries—at least we are growing tired of seeing them. On an individual scale we are beginning to suspect that walls and fences are a costly nuisance to build and maintain, occupy much space, and far from guaranteeing privacy, actually invite vandalism and intrusion. Even national boundaries are becoming more flexible, and when public opinion disapproves on moral or esthetic or economic grounds of boundaries and frontiers we can be fairly certain that the political role of the landscape is no longer paramount and that we have begun interpreting it in other terms.

So boundaries which are highly visible and jealously protected, boundaries whether linear or of that buffer variety, belong in landscapes designed by—and for—political animals, and often for four-footed animals as well.

**Forum Follows Function**

When we hear mention of political spaces and their value, what comes to mind is the familiar space—plaza or market or town square or forum—where we gather to enjoy the company of others and pass the time of day. It would be hard to find a community without such a space: alive and full of action, with people buying and selling, talking and listening, walking and looking about, or merely resting. Sometimes the space is the civic center, ornate and immense, sometimes it is nothing more than an empty lot or a wide space in the street. It is always enjoyable, and instinct tells us that a public space of one kind or another is essential to any community.

But there is a great variety in the way these public spaces are used, and a great variety in the groups of people who use them. In a political landscape they play a very different role than they do in a landscape like that of contemporary America. Architectural and urban historians often analyze as works of art, and indeed that is what many of them seem to be, but it is their social function that we should look at first of all. In his book *Town and Square* Paul Zucker defines the space as one “which makes a community a community and not merely an aggregate of individuals... a gathering place for the people, humanizing them by mutual contact, providing them with a shelter against the haphazard traffic, and freeing them from the tension of rushing through a web of streets.”

Here is a characteristically modern definition of the public square: a place of passive enjoyment, a kind of playground for adults, and it says a good deal about how slack our current definition of community can be. Zucker and many others are content to describe the public square strictly in terms of gregariousness: how it offers a spatial experience shared by a heterogeneous public which will sooner or later go its separate ways; an urban form which acts to draw people together and give them a momentary pleasure and sense of well-being. No one should underestimate those benefits, but in the political landscape the public square serves an entirely different purpose. It is assumed that those who come there are already aware that they are members of the community, responsible citizens, and that on occasion they will participate in public discussions and take action on behalf of the community.

True, every traditional public space has served several ends: marketplace, a place of business and a place of informal sociability and amusement, a place for pageantry. The agora in Athens, far from being architecturally impressive, was a jumble of crowded downtown streets and irregular open spaces where shrines and altars, public buildings and monuments stood in the midst of workshops, market stalls, and taverns. For Athenians of conservative tastes, as R. E. Wyckoff reminds us, “the agora was the haunt of the dregs of the populace, the home of idleness, vulgarity and gossip.” Aristotel, who thought of the agora chiefly as a place for discussion and the exchange of ideas, described in *The Politics* his ideal public square: All commercial activities and all merchants and vendors were to be exiled to another part of town. “Nothing here [in the agora] may be bought or sold, and no member of the lower order may be admitted unless summoned by the authorities... The market proper, where buying and selling are done, must be in quite a separate place, conveniently situated both for goods sent up from the harbor and for people coming in from the country.”

Aristotle's suggestions were ignored in antiquity, but they seem to have inspired some of the features of the Spanish colonial towns laid out according to the Laws of the Indies. Their produce market was located outside the plaza, and the presence of Indians was strictly controlled.

To see one of these traditional public squares in action, or better yet to take part in the action, is one of the greatest pleasures the tourist can know. Nothing is more festive than the corso in a Mexican plaza after dark, with the band playing, the women strolling clockwise around the square while the men go counterclockwise. And what is more colorful than a Moslem market or bazaar? No wonder every American wishes we had more such places in our cities. An eminent architect has gone so far as to say that the plaza is the basis of civilization and that our failure to have examples is a sign of American decadence. But there are those who have grown weary of our cult of the plaza as the solution to all our urban problems. Robert Venturi holds that “archi-
tects have been bewitched by a single element in the Italian landscape: the piazza. . . . [They] have been brought up on Space, and enclosed space is the easiest to handle."

I am inclined to agree, though my objection to the contemporary American plaza derives from a suspicion that most of its proponents do not really understand what it is. They think of it as an environment, a stage set, yet it has always been something much more worthwhile than that. It was, and in many places still is, a manifestation of the local social order, of the relationship between citizens and between citizens and the authority of the state. The plaza is where the role of the individual in the community is made visible, where we reveal our identity as part of an ethnic or religious or political or consumer-oriented society, and it exists and functions to reinforce that identity.

That is one reason for learning to perceive the urban public space not simply in esthetic or environmental terms, but in terms of history. When we do that we discover that there are many different kinds of squares, each with its own ideology, its own origin often at odds with its everyday appearance. Urbanists and architects, in keeping with that fascination with Space that Venturi decries, praise the immense, open, unencumbered space or plaza of the Pueblo villages of the Southwest as the perfect center for the fostering of community interaction. But the fact of the matter is, the Pueblo plaza is primarily the site of periodic religious ceremonies, and its focal point is a shrine called the World Navel, the place of communication with the ancestral spirits. Casual sociability—at least until recently—was confined to the flat roofs of the surrounding houses.

Every traditional public space, whether religious or political or ethnic in character, displays a variety of symbols, inscriptions, images, monuments, not as works of art but to remind people of their civic privileges and duties—and tacitly to exclude the outsider. The Roman Forum was cluttered with such reminders, and though the colonial New England town was hostile to public art it nevertheless contained a number of powerful symbols, impossible to misinterpret: the church with its steeple and bell, its front door covered with public notices and decrees; the whipping post, the stocks, the graveyard, and sometimes the tree ceremoniously planted by the first settlers. All of these served to tell those who came to the church services or town meeting or to the militia drill that they were part of a tight-knit religious community and had obligations. The public space was not for relaxation or environmental awareness; it was for civic awareness.

As we might expect, the ideal public square in the political landscape has a strong architectural quality. It occupies the most prestigious location in the principal town and is surrounded by politically significant buildings: law court, archives, treasury, legislative hall, and often military headquarters and jail as well. The space itself is adorned with statues of local heroes and divinities, monuments to important historic events. All important ceremonies are enacted here. Typical of the political emphasis on boundaries, the area is well defined by markers and has its own laws and its own officers. Finally, it is here in the agora or forum that history is made visible and where speech becomes a political instrument, eloquence a form of political action.

What is the origin of this space dedicated to public debate and public visibility? Jean-Pierre Vernant in his studies of historical psychology traces the evolution of the agora from the practice of the special warrior class of ancient Greece of periodically assembling in military formation—in a circle, that is to say—to discuss matters of common concern. One after another, the men step into the circle and freely express themselves. When each has finished, he steps back and another takes his place and says his piece. The circle is thus a place of free speech and debate. In the course of time this agora (the word means "assembly") becomes the meeting of all qualified citizens; they too debate matters of common interest. Vernant comments: "[T]he human group creates this image of itself: along with the private dwellings there is a center where public affairs are discussed, and this center represents everything that is "common," the collectivity as such. In this center all persons are on a footing of equality, no one is inferior to anyone else. . . . We here see the birth of a society in which the relationships between man and man are perceived as identical, symmetrical, interchangeable. . . . It could be said that by having access to this circular space known as the agora, citizens become part of a political system based on balance, symmetry, reciprocity."

Vernant goes on to speculate on how this notion of equality and interchangeability may well have inspired Hippodamus to create the grid city plan of identical, interchangeable blocks.

In seventeenth-century France something resembling a new political landscape emerged, and there, in consequence, the public square became a work of art—a place where the social hierarchy could display itself to best advantage. We Americans later produced our own version—less elaborate, no doubt, but more faithful to the classic prototype. For more than half a century after the Revolution we remained loyal to the national political landscape of identical, interchangeable townsplishes all centered on the county seat with its courthouse square. I have suggested elsewhere how that tradition lingered longer in the South than in other regions. The memory of the classical public space as the place of oratory and as the safeguard of democracy died hard, and no longer than seventy-five years ago we undertook to bring it back to life—statues, colonnades, and fountain—in the grandiloquent form known as the City Beautiful. Civic centers in San Francisco, Denver, Washington, and other cities still testify to its brief popularity.

I think we have finally come to recognize that we no longer know how to use the traditional public space as an effective political instrument, and that we need a wide choice of very different kinds of public space. No one has
written more perceptively on the matter than William H. Whyte. In a recent article telling of his extensive research into how such spaces are used in New York, he makes it plain that what we now want most of all is an agreeable “environmental” experience. The most popular, most frequented plazas and small parks are those which (he says) provide an agreeable microclimate, easy accessibility, some sensational object like a piece of sculpture or a display of flowing water, and which (this is most essential) allow people to sit comfortably and relax. “What attracts people most,” he concludes, “are other people.” But what does other people mean? Those with whom (to use Aristotle’s phrase) we can exchange “moral or noble ideas”? No; “other people” more often than not in this new urban space seems to mean voices and color and movement and fleeting impressions. People have become elements of animation in a pleasantly planned environment, and we are social beings merely to the extent that we want to be “at one” with that particular environment.

These contemporary urban parks, I cannot help feeling, are the last poor remnants of what was once an almost sacred space, but in our rejection of their political function we presage not the end of civilization but the end of one chapter. We are better off than we suppose; our landscape has an undreamed of potential for public spaces of infinite variety. When we look back a century, or even a half century, we realize how many new public or common spaces have appeared in our towns and cities, spaces where people come together spontaneously and without restraint. I am thinking of how the role of the college campus has changed, even in my own day. A half century ago it was a jealously guarded academic grove, surrounded by a fence and looked upon by the public with a mixture of envy and contempt. It now plays a leading role in the cultural life of all classes in the community. In the high school auditorium many smaller communities not only come in contact with ideas but discuss them in meetings. The sports arena belongs in a different class, but in one respect it is the legitimate successor of the agora or forum: it is where we demonstrate local loyalties—loudly as the Greeks would have done and with gestures. The flea market is a new and unpredictable public space and so is the strip. If their humanizing function seems doubtful that may be because they have yet to develop, but even now there can be no doubt as to their popularity.

It is next to impossible to enumerate all the new spaces we are using and enjoying together. Wherever we look we see a new one: the cluster of campers in a recreation area, the Sunday meetings of classic car buffs in the empty parking lots of supermarkets, outdoor revivals, protest parades, stamp collectors’ markets, family reunions, and the picnics of the sons and daughters of Iowa—all of them public, all of them fulfilling in one manner or another the needs once met in a single, consecrated space.

In the meantime the obsolete courthouse is demolished and replaced by a parking garage, and a giant Calder mobile takes the place of the statue to a Civil War general, and downtown, the victim of urban renewal, waits to be restored. What is left of the old political landscape vanishes, space by space, but as yet we have no name for the one which is taking form around us.

Roads

I am about to introduce a new and imposing word to the landscape lexicon, and that word is _odology_. It comes from the Greek _bodos_, meaning road or journey. Odology is thus the science or study of roads.

But the question arises: Is _road_ the best word we can find? It is very commonplace, and to speak of a science of roads is to imply that the landscape student should be interested in the work of the engineer and matters of construction, alignment, and the efficient movement of goods. Moreover _road_ is a relatively new word in English. It became part of the language only in Shakespeare’s time, and it first meant nothing more than a journey on horseback. It is still too much of a novelty to have been used in imaginative figures of speech, and no matter how hard we try to give it color, it remains steadfastly prosaic and literal. It would be well if we found a substitute for it. Our way would then be clear to defining _odology_ more comprehensively.

And _way_ is exactly the word we are seeking! Far older, far more deeply rooted in the language, it has accumulated so many different meanings, is used in so many different metaphors that its original sense of “path” is almost lost. But not entirely. _Way_ signifies not only path, but also direction and by extension, intent and manner. We “have our way,” we “do things in a way,” we follow “a way of life.” The phrase “ways and means” suggests that the word can indicate resources at our disposal for attaining an end, and in fact two English words deriving from _bodos_ remind us of this: _exodus_ means the departure from a place, and _method_ (bodos is concealed in the second syllable) means a regular or systematic way of accomplishing anything. A way, in short, is a means by which some end, some goal can be reached, and this popular usage undoubtedly accounts for the frequent use of the word for religious beliefs and actions. The Sacred Way (and its innumerable variants) was both a method of spiritual discipline and a road or path leading to a shrine or temple. In the mythical past of Greece the way as symbol and as reality were often indistinguishable. The work of the road builder was seen as dedicated to the gods and was sponsored and directed by priests. According to Greek belief, the gods themselves first traced the alignment of the roads, and Delphi, the center of the cult of Apollo, was never thought of as his home but as the terminus and goal of all the ways he followed. A road which led to a shrine was considered sacred, and no traveler on it was ever molested. Even its margins had a sacred character and were chosen as places of burial.

In his account of his travels through Greece in the second century A.D.
Pausanias mentions many times the tombs he saw along the side of the road near cities and country towns.

In those days travelers went more by sea than by land. Greece was a mountainous country with many small ports, and except for a well-made highway between Athens and its port, Piraeus, its roads were often little more than rough trails leading out of the hills to the nearby center, and most of the traffic was on foot. Where there was a shrine or a temple there was almost always a marketplace or agora, usually with a fountain, and so every road or trail ended not only at a sacred place, but in a town where people gathered. The many attributes of Hermes, the god of roads and travelers, tell us something of the several functions of even the smallest of country trails and paths leading to town. As messenger of the gods, Hermes was the witness of treaties and agreements, the guide who conducted the dead to Hades, and the god of the marketplace. His carved image served to indicate boundaries and was frequently seen along country roads, and he was also the protector of doors and entrances. He presided over all gatherings of people, and at the same time he was the god of the pastoral landscape, the protector of flocks and shepherds, and was often depicted as carrying a lamb over his shoulder. By all accounts he was the least warlike of the divinities and was admired less for his strength than for his grace, less for his sense of honor than for his sociable nature. It is not easy to draw any conclusion from this great variety of characteristics, except that it is possible to see Hermes as a link, a mediator between two worlds: the world of the living and that of the dead, the rural world and the urban world, the public space and the secret space of the home. Perhaps we could say that he was the god of country roads—roads which shifted location but always eventually led to the temple and the agora; the centrifugal roads which farmers and herders use to go to town, where people on foot—pilgrims and merchants and peddlers—travel to their destination. Hermes, the god of mediation, the god of contracts and agreements, seems to symbolize the road as a mean, the way to a chosen end.

When we speculate about the nature of the road in a political landscape we should distinguish between the small, isolated centrifugal system, subject to constant change, showing for so little on maps and playing so insignificant a role in the history of material progress, and the impressive, widespread, permanent centrifugal system of highways which we associate with Rome and other empires. Both kinds serve much the same purpose: the strengthening and maintenance of a social order, the tying together at one central place all the spaces which constitute the territory of a community or state, but there are sharp differences between them, not only of scale, but of direction and intent. We have heard so much about the marvels of the Roman system as well as about those of ancient Persia and of the pre-Columbian Incas that it seems scarcely worthwhile discussing them further. Traditional odology, al-

most exclusively concerned with the technology of roads and their economic function, has taught us to marvel at the thousands of miles of straight, broad, massive construction, the system of rest houses and relay stations, the steady traffic of military formations, officials, messengers going from Rome to distant points in Gaul and Spain and Asia Minor. How often we have been told of the speed of travel over these highways, the splendor of the bridges, and learned of the incredible durability of their paved surfaces—in many places still in use after more than two millennia of service! We have been amazed; but odology properly interpreted implies more than engineering. It implies among other things that there are almost everywhere two parallel systems of roads, one of them local and centrifugal, the other regional or national and centrifugal, and we need to recognize the role of both. We need to compare them, particularly when (as in the present case) we are interested in the political complexion of the landscape.

Let me therefore suggest three of the most obvious characteristics of the centrifugal or national highway system, discernible not only in the Roman Empire but in ancient Persia, in the pre-Columbian Inca Empire, even in seventeenth-century France and in contemporary America. Briefly, these are, first, a vastness of scale, second, a disregard of local landscape features, topographical as well as man-made, and last, a persistent emphasis on military and commercial functions. "All roads lead to Rome" is of course a way of saying that Rome is (or was) the supreme destination. But in fact a centrifugal highway system reaching out to control remote areas, important frontier points, as well as fostering commerce with overseas markets always originates in the capital city. In a sense, then, all roads lead from Rome, all are built to extend and consolidate the imperial power. The first such highway, the Appian Way, was begun in 312 B.C. as the result of territorial conquest and in order to reach further south. The last highway built by Trajan, four centuries later, was to facilitate the conquest of what is now Rumania.

A golden marker was inserted in the pavement of the Roman Forum to show the spot from which all highways were measured, and handsomely carved milestones gave the name of the highway, the name of the sponsoring authority, and told the distance from that golden marker. In the United States, where we inherited much of the Classical tradition, we too assume that the road or highway—provided it is the creation of the federal government—begins at the center of political power, for there is such a marker, though not of gold, on the grounds of the Capitol in Washington, and similar markers are to be found near many state capitols as well.

This exalted origin gives a special quality to the Roman highway, no matter how far it leads into the provinces. It was as if it were superimposed on its rural setting and had no relationship to it. The straightest alignment was the shortest and the one preferred, and so confident were the Roman surveyors and engineers of their ability to overcome almost any topograph-
ical obstacle that they laid out their road straight from one point to another, often distant, and thought nothing of crossing marshes by means of solid causeways and slicing through hills. One stretch of a highway in northern Italy went 163 miles with scarcely the slightest deviation. Throughout the whole system there prevailed the same generous dimensions, the same heavy, enduring construction, the same facilities, and the same overwhelming imperial presence, at once reassuring and intimidating.

Consistent with this refusal to compromise with the terrain was the practice of bypassing not only villages but even towns in favor of a more direct route. The royal highway built by the kings of Persia three thousand years ago avoided all provincial centers lest an invading army, using the highway, find stores of arms and supplies, and though in the Roman Empire the highways were available to civilian traffic, local travelers, mostly on foot or horseback, preferred the lateral dirt roads which led to the villages; moreover the system of relay stations and messengers was reserved for government use. The Inca Empire had a remarkably extensive highway system of its own: more than three thousand miles of wonderfully engineered roads and bridges reaching from one end of the territory to the other. But these roads—unpaved because of the total lack of wheeled traffic—were meant for the use of soldiers, officials, and foot messengers, and no one else was allowed to use them.

The notion that certain important highways were meant primarily for the exercise of sovereign authority and to maintain order carried over into America until well into the nineteenth century: soldiers on duty, judges, officials, and clergymen were not obliged to pay toll on the turnpikes, bridges, and ferries.

It seems obvious that when there are restrictions on the use of the centripetal, national highway, or when it is not conveniently located, the rural traveler will devise another way of traveling to the village, and this will consist of paths and trails and primitive roads beaten by local traffic and closely adjusted to the topography and soil, changing when the roads become impassable or according to the season. Thus there evolves what we might call a vernacular road system: flexible, without overall plan, but definitely centripetal; a system which is isolated, usually without maintenance, and the bane of long-range travelers and of a government wanting to expedite military or commercial traffic. So it is only a matter of time before the local system is taken in hand and coordinated with the national network—usually much to the distress of the small community involved.

Rome was probably the first state to plan new rural road systems, and the outcome was an extensive artificial political landscape which has served as a model for many modern plans. As the Republic and later the Empire expanded, it found itself engaged in the settling of new or vacated territories.
and in the establishing of communities of small farmers. The usual procedure was to divide the publicly owned lands into large squares of about 120 acres, called *centuriae*, of a little less than a half mile to the side. Some of these resettlement or settlement projects were small, but as John Bradford writes in his book on aerial archaeology, "the first and fundamental impression that we receive from the system spread across North Italy is the magnitude of the conception that inspired their construction, and the blend of ambition and stubborn capability in matters of detail that could give effect to it. Virtually it would have been possible to ride from Turin to Trieste—a distance of 300 miles from west to east—within centuriated systems all the way."

What concerns us in the system is the function of the road. Each of these *centuriae*, or rectangles, was divided into farms varying in size between 25 and 100 acres, depending on soil, topography, and the legislation creating the project. The *centuriae* were bounded by roads, and the whole landscape was a grid system of straight roads, usually bordered by irrigation ditches, hedges, and trees, and crossing at right angles.

Most of these farms raised wheat, grapes, and assorted fruits and vegetables, all of which they sold in the nearest *colonia*, or planned town; and farms of this sort needed a road system not only to reach their fields and orchards and transport the produce to market, but as a sort of permanent, large-scale framework for the irrigation ditches. The roads appear to have been well constructed and carefully as classified as to width and type of use: the *iter*, or footpath, 2 feet wide, the *acetum*, or cattle drive, 4 feet wide, and the *via*, or vehicular road, 8 feet wide. The nucleus of the landscape was the point of intersection of two highways, the *decumanus maximus* (east—west) and the *cardo maximus* (north—south), and it was here that a town was usually built.

The choice of this spot had in the remote past been a solemn ceremony. "For the Etruscans [the axial system] incorporated the relation between terrestrial delimitation and the celestial temple. The heavens were like a circle divided in four parts by two axes. The *cardine* and *decumanus* as employed in city planning were an earthly representation of the heavenly pattern." Germanic folklore likewise attached great religious importance to the crossroads as a place of justice or retribution. But by the time the Romans were laying out the centuriated landscapes the symbolic meaning of the intersection of those two highways was pretty well forgotten, and in fact it was the military encampment rather than the image of a celestial temple that served as a model for the new towns. "The Roman urban planner," Castagnoli remarks, "was little moved by celestial speculation and adopted the principles of axial symmetry because they corresponded to Roman taste.... Furthermore, axial symmetry embodied the concept of military discipline and centralized political power, focusing the city upon a single point, where the magistrate exercised his authority."

So the *colonia*, the chief town in each of these artificial landscapes, played a

prosaic role: it was the place of the market, the place of government administration, the place of justice—all of them centered around that important intersection in a rectangular forum. The whole system of land distribution had two characteristics worth bearing in mind, for they distinguish the Roman grid landscape from our own, despite the obvious similarities between the two: the Roman landscape was focused on a centrally located town, whereas our grid system never included any provision for urban settlements. Second, the Roman land holdings were based on a traditional stabilized type of farming (or gardening) and a traditional size, appropriate to family exploitation and the use of a yoke of oxen. The American system on the contrary stipulated only a *minimum* size for the individual holding and implied no particular kind of agriculture. Thus the Roman landscape was intended for a special kind of citizen: the citizen as small landholder, farmer, soldier (or veteran), taxpayer, attached to his piece of land and dependent on the urban center. The road system helped maintain that identity. Unlike the roads in nucleated or clustered farm villages that lead out to the pastures and fields and other places of more or less solitary, routine work, the roads in the centuriated landscape lead from the independent homestead to the town with its market, its forum, its religious ceremonies and monuments, its political life. And the road itself was often a place of social behavior; most travel was on foot; the roadside shrines and monuments, the frequent intersections, the houses flanking it, the shade of the trees, and the flowing irrigation ditches—all gave it animation.

But the importance of the road in the political landscape reminds us of something we are not always willing to accept: man as a political animal is always inclined to be footloose, inclined to leave family and home for a more stimulating place. As inhabitants of the earth we like to put our roots down and to belong to a certain spot, never to move again; the road or highway is a menace. Yet that other, political identity urges us to leave and to seek out the locus of action and discourse. Town, where we become citizens and can be seen, begins directly outside our door, where the road stands for public life. If, as the Greeks believed, the gods in their wandering made the first roads, then I daresay it is an act of piety to follow in their footsteps, and politically speaking, the best of all landscapes, the best of all roads, are those which foster movement toward a desirable social goal. But that is something for the odologist to decide.

**Spaces, Sacred and Profane**

Wherever we go in the contemporary landscape we run across these signs: boundaries, roads, and places of assembly. We read them at once, and we not only read them, we create them ourselves, almost without realizing that without them we could not function as members of society. To me this
universal need—and universal ability—to organize space, to divide it into microspaces, assemble them into macrospaces, is impressive evidence that there is a common, unchanging human nature. But each age, each society develops its own unique kind of spatial organization. There are societies which cannot rest until they have defined every space, natural or man-made, in conveniently human or political categories. If, for instance, there is a river, it is immediately thought of in terms of navigation or water power. If there are mountains they are to be used for defense or grazing or the providing of wood, and if there is open country, it is to be divided up into farms and home lots and given a system of roads.

The message here is that in the political landscape the natural environment has no inherent identity of its own; it is simply a means to an end, a human end, and space is consequently organized so that every group, every activity has its own well-defined space. Aristotle said that in the Agora the older people and the younger people were to have their own separate places for exercising; not because there was danger of friction between the generations; on the contrary, if they shared a space they might merge and become indistinguishable.

Differences in spatial organization are largely a matter of how we happen to classify things and occupations and people, and separate them. There are societies where all garden plants are grown together though great distinctions will be made as to who eats what. There are societies where the house is simply one large room. And, in fact, we notice that we ourselves are beginning to ignore some traditional divisions. There was a time, about a century ago, when the introduction of a separate room for eating, a dining room, was considered a triumph of civilization. But now we usually eat and cook and watch television in the same place. We are trying to eliminate racial and class divisions in our cities, and we talk about a national forest as "a land of many uses," meaning that it can be used for recreation and lumbering and grazing and wildlife preservation. More and more we are turning away from the old concepts and trying to discover a harmonious relationship with natural spaces, spaces defined by climate or topography. Yet we can never entirely do without the human basis of spatial organization, for there will be times and places where the space itself is less important than the content, where space simply plays the role of background.

In that pattern of spaces we call a landscape, particularly a rural landscape, the most common, the most elementary space is that small piece of land where a family lives and works. Every other space is a modification or an extension of it. In the political landscape we learn to perceive it as the prototypical minispace. For the assumption (based less on history than on theory) is that in the beginning each family received a piece of land large enough to provide it with a living and roughly equal in value to every other piece. This piece of land we even today call "a lot," a usage harking back to an age when the distribution was made by the drawing of lots. But whereas to us distribution of that kind seems governed entirely by chance, there was a time when it seemed a divine dispensation, the decision of some god. "The lot by which [the holdings] were distributed," Plato tells us, "is a god. . . . You may choose or decline to take part in the distribution, but if you do take part you . . . must acknowledge that the land is sacred to all the gods . . . and anyone buying and selling his allotted land or house must suffer the penalty appropriate to the crime."12

The once prevalent notion that land was never to be alienated but was to remain in possession of the family forever is a reminder that there is (or was) a religious landscape or at least a religious interpretation of landscape formation. In The Ancient City Fustel de Coulanges ascribes the existence and importance of landed private property to the old practice of burying the family dead in the fields of the farm, making them in effect sacred spaces. But in the strictly theoretical landscape of antiquity this explanation was discounted, and other more secular justifications for the persistence of the family-sized farm were found. The farm was essential (many believed) simply because it produced food and enabled the family to survive. It was desirable chiefly from the economic point of view. A more thoughtful explanation was that the farmer, because of his work outdoors, was likely to be a good soldier, strong and inured to hardship. A third point of view, popular among statesmen and philosophers, and probably based on observation, was that the family-sized farm produced men who were not only physically but also mentally qualified to serve as soldiers, for they were usually steady, methodical, and little given to political agitation—not rebelling as long as their existence was bearable.

It is from Aristotle that we derive our idealized version of the small landowner as a model of civic virtue. "When the farming element, being in possession of a moderate amount of property, is the predominant section, the work of the constitution goes on in accordance with the laws; because so long as they work they have enough to live on, but they cannot take time off in order to hold office, so they install the law as a guiding principle and themselves only attend the necessary meetings of the Assembly of the people,"13 and again: "An agricultural population makes the best demos . . . For having no great abundance of wealth they are kept busy and rarely attend the Assembly; on the other hand being constantly at work in the fields they do not lack the necessities. So they do not covet other's possessions . . . Moreover to have the power to vote at elections makes up any deficiency which those who have political ambitions may feel."14

The virtues identified with this middling way of life, halfway between the aristocratic and the rootless existences of the urban proletariat, are essentially domestic: the ability to manage the household, to give orders to the slaves or laborers; self-reliance, respect for tradition, respect for the rights of neigh-
bors. The civic role of the small independent farmer is limited to his wise and moderate involvement in village affairs; the urban assembly is not his realm. If he is called upon to serve as a soldier it is because as a free man and citizen he is entitled to possess arms and has a vested interest in the defense of the state; physical prowess has little to do with his qualifications. Thus the earlier idea that the farmer was a good soldier because he was a hard worker is modified; he is now valued for his moral qualities, and indeed he is all the better suited for public affairs for leaving the heavy work to slaves and spending his leisure in self-improvement.

The family holding is thus a miniature state, neither too large nor too small for its purpose. It is surrounded by a very visible wall or by rows of trees, it is near enough the road to be in touch with the community, and yet it is distinctly and forever separate. It is a territory with its own domestic hierarchy, its own ancestors, its own divinities to be venerated on special days and in special places. It enforces its own code of conduct, its own traditional relationships, generation after generation, but at the same time is much concerned with keeping its image honored and respected by the outside world. This unit is, in theory at least, only large enough to occupy two able-bodied men, father and son, and only one yoke of oxen; though in fact many such family units were far larger and more luxurious, and the owners in consequence more powerful political figures. Ruskin paints an attractive picture of what he supposes that Classical landscape to have been. After mentioning how Classical descriptions of landscape reveal its "subservience to human comfort, to the foot, the taste, the smell," and their "excessive similarity" he concludes that the most perfect spot would be a garden

where the principal ideas are . . . order, symmetry, and fruitfulness; the beds being duly ranged between rows of vines, which, as well as the pear, apple, and fig trees, bear fruit continually. Some grapes are yet sour, while others are getting black; there are plenty of "orderly square beds of herbs," chiefly leeks, and two fountains, one running through the garden, and one under the pavement of the palace to a reservoir for the citizens. . . . In all this I cannot too strongly mark the utter absence of any trace of the feeling for what we call the picturesque, and the constant dwelling . . . on what was available, pleasant, or useful.

Ruskin then adds a scornful comment on the "blundering, pseudo-picturesque, pseudo-classical minds of Claude and the Renaissance landscape painters."

He is in one respect quite right, for Renaissance landscape paintings ignore the small farm almost completely. Yet every society which organizes space in political terms tries, with varying success, to create and preserve those small, not very productive pieces of private property. If (as eventually happens) they are devoured by speculators and large landowners, or if they are abandoned by their families in favor of the city, their image is kept alive in literature. Virgil wrote beautifully of life on the hereditary farm, and so did Horace.

Cicero spoke in defense of the few remaining Sicilian farmers—"Those whose means of tillage consist of one yoke of oxen, who labor on their farms with their own hands"—and Cincinnatus, who reluctantly left his small farm and a frugal existence to become dictator, was of course not only a Roman hero but the archetypal farmer-as-citizen. Even Vitruvius, writing at a time when large estates were replacing the small farms, pays lip service to the tradition of rustic simplicity and independence.

Here is John Adams repeating Classical saws: "The only possible way then of preserving public virtue is to make the acquisition of land easy to every member of society: to make the division of land into small quantities, so that the multitudes may be possessed of landed estates."

And Jefferson with his colleagues then produced a political landscape faithful to Classical theory: a vast grid system, a nationwide (or almost nationwide) composition of squares. Though not specifically designed to be divided into small holdings for those whom Jefferson described as God's "peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtues"—farmers, that is to say—it encourages their formation, and as the Midwest becomes populated and flourishes as an agricultural countryside, America is pleased to see the unfolding of a landscape dedicated to civic virtue. "The farmer is the most noble and independent man in society," an agricultural editor declared in 1841. "He has ever been honored and respected from the days of Cincinnatus, the Roman farmer."

But as is often the case, literature and political oratory were behind the times, eulogizing a landscape feature which was already on its way out. Public opinion was beginning to soft-pedal the importance of virtue on the family farm and indeed to depoliticize the whole new landscape. The small, independent farmstead was instead seen as a bulwark against the expansion of slavery or as an outlet for the urban poor or as providing the western railroad lines with customers and traffic, and today those who promote it do so because (we are told) it is healthy and inexpensive or because it can produce certain labor intensive goods which the large commercial farmers cannot cultivate with profit or because a landscape of small farms, each with a tree-embowered homestead, is a valuable amenity. Social or economic or ecological arguments, not political arguments, are thus the ones we use in discussing the family farm. Those who criticize it, engineers and agronomists, say that it is too small to be efficient in this day of expensive farm equipment: radical political theory condemns it as a reactionary stronghold of bourgeois individualism, sociologists point to the poverty and hopelessness of the average small farm, particularly in the South. There are even environmentalists who warn us that we can no longer leave the management of our countryside to small farmers, desperately producing larger and larger crops regardless of the long-range ecological costs.

Perhaps our dilemma comes in part from the fact that we still think of the
family farm in terms of traditional visibility and permanence: a farm of permanent size with a permanent homestead and a permanent type of agriculture: a reassuringly stable element in the landscape, always easy to identify. But is there no other way of envisaging it? Fraser Hart suggests that we abandon the idea that the family farm is always owned by the farmer, that it is always a homogeneous unit, that it always produces the same crops: those were Classical criteria, no longer applicable.

A family farm is simply an operating unit which provides an adequate level of living for the labor of a father and son, with a hired hand at certain stages of the demographic cycle. . . . Neither size nor ownership are stipulated in this system. . . . No matter what the farming system, the amount of land which was large enough for a family farm a generation ago has become, or is becoming, too small, and the size of the operating unit must be enlarged. . . . The farmer who rents the land he needs to expand his operation, in order to keep his family farm from degenerating into an undersized unit, often discovers that tenancy is not so bad after all.16

But Plato would not have approved.

Visibility

Several times in discussing the political landscape I have mentioned the importance of visibility. In our context, the word means of course something more than that an object can be seen. It means that it is conspicuous, that it is distinct from its surroundings, and that as a form it can be understood at a glance; and in this sense it is obvious that not all objects in the landscape are really visible. To the environmentalist the topography and vegetation have visibility, to the student of architecture it will be the buildings; all the rest is merely background, and all objects in that background seem to merge into a kind of invisibility.

The student of the political landscape will look for a special kind of visibility, and what that is likely to be we learn from the writings of Pausanias, whom I have mentioned once before. He indicates very clearly what the political—or Classical—observer perceives as visible and what can be ignored. As he traveled through second-century Greece, conscientiously going from town to town to learn what he could about each of them, the things that caught his eye were almost exclusively man-made. He described the roadside monuments and tombs, the walls built around cities, the processional streets leading to the agora or acropolis. He examined every shrine, statue, temple, public building, visited every acropolis where monuments were to be found. He visited the theater and the stadium and the agora itself.

He did this not as amateur of art or even as an antiquarian; he did it because these were the only objects with what to him was visibility. The impression of the ancient Greek landscape that we get from Pausanias is fragmentary and from our point of view hopelessly incomplete. What does he have to say about the layout of the city, about the places where people live and work and play, about everyday existence? What does he tell us about the natural landscape of mountains and seacoast he spent so much time traveling through, or about the well-populated rural countryside? The visibility we look for in vain in Classical accounts is given us in a succinct and vivid form in the words of a modern historical geographer.

In the fifth century the typical [Greek] city was still but a jumble of narrow winding streets and one-storeyed houses amid which lay somewhat incongruously the agora, or market place, and the public buildings upon which it had perhaps lavished a large amount of its income. It was, in fact, little more than an overgrown village. Even Athens had its slums. "The city itself," wrote the Pseudo-Dicaearchus, "is dry and ill-supplied with water. The streets are nothing but miserable old lanes, the houses mean, with a few better ones among them." The majority of the houses consisted of a single room, with floor of beaten clay and walls of sun-dried bricks. In the case of Athens the oldest and poorest housing lay nearest to the Acropolis.17

What we find important in the city is the social or sociological. We have become almost blind to the political: to those spaces and structures which Pausanias identified with the permanent and public aspects of the community, its political symbols. He gives us a landscape punctuated, as it were, by a number of separate, more or less isolated "timeless" forms and spaces—forms and spaces, moreover, that reinforce status rather than serve a function.

In his discussion of Classical (or political) space Spengler remarks that the Classical statue in its splendid bodilessness—all structure and expressive surfaces and no incorporeal arrière pensée whatsoever—contains without remainder all that Actuality is for the Classical eye. The Classical universe, the Cosmos or well-ordered aggregate of all near and completely viewable things, is concluded by the corporeal vault of heaven. . . . The State is a body which is made up of all the bodies of its citizens, the law knows only corporeal persons and material things. And the feeling finds its last and noblest expression in the stone body of the Classical Temple.18

We could scarcely accuse the political landscape of the early United States or even that of seventeenth-century France of making a cult of the body. But the isolated, domineering public building or monument certainly found favor in both countries, and both resembled the Classical prototype in their design and use of space to indicate status: what better expression of an egalitarian political ideal than the uniform squares of our grid landscape and our grid cities? It is in this kind of political spatial organization that the boundary plays so significant a role. As I have suggested, the political function of the boundary is not to define a homogeneous area but to protect the object which it surrounds. To repeat, the political (as distinguished from the social or topographical) boundary is not a tight-fitting epidermis, it is a loose-fitting envelope, a way of giving a visible, corporeal identity to a temple, a city, a
state. Wyckrley speaks of the walls surrounding Greek communities as being “loosely flung around a city; it was not the frame into which the rest was fitted, and it was not normally a dominant factor in the plan.” And in fact these walls were sometimes so extensive that they could not be adequately manned by the population. They were, in short, visible confirmation of the permanence and sanctity of the city, so much so that Plato in The Laws proposed that all the dwellings in his Utopian city should be part of the city wall. “If men are to have a city wall at all, the private houses should be constructed right from the foundations so that the whole city forms in effect a single wall. ... A whole city looking like a single wall will be quite a pretty sight.”

No doubt; instead of being a haphazard collection of private, temporary, changeable dwellings it would be a permanent and visible element in the political landscape.

One last word on the ancient significance of boundaries. In the “regions” of Rome, the ancient administrative subdivisions of the city, “the areas were not defined in terms of dimensions, now the practice though never customary in Antiquity or in the Middle Ages, but in terms of their perimeters”—in other words in terms of their boundaries, their visible features.

Do we need to be reminded of how over the last hundred years the American landscape has destroyed the political organization of space in favor of an economic or ecological organization? Of how we have managed to desanctify and destabilize space and liberate it from its two-dimensional constraints? We have only to look around us to see what has happened. I am thinking in particular of the current generation of environmental designers, who are very much aware of the spatial revolution, inspired by it, and yet uncertain of how to express it. To many of them (judging more from what they say and write than from what they actually do) it is much as if traditional visible spaces were being swallowed up by an endless, timeless invisible Superspace, so that all they can think about is not space itself but how we react to it: how we perceive it, how we behave in it, how ideas are diffused in it; spatial simulation models, the semiotics of space, space and phenomenology. In time these speculations will bear fruit. But they are not yet helpful to the layman, who still hankers after visible evidence of the changes in store for us all. That is why it is useful to study spatial organizations in other societies and at other times: not to imitate them but to learn that in the field of landscapes, what we see, what we have understood, what we enjoy all count for a great deal in how we organize space ourselves.

From that point of view the political landscape, even though obsolete, has several things in its favor. When, for instance, spaces—whether public or private—are meant to last and to be looked at they are likely to be given an agreeable, easily apprehended shape: preferably square, if not, rectangular; and when that is not possible, then at least chunky; thickest and clear as to

form and always well defined. Perhaps that is one reason for the Greeks preferring—at least after the fifth century—the grid plan city; the neat array of uniform, rectangular blocks made the composition easy to interpret as a visible unit. We might recall that our own Continental Congress stipulated in 1780—well before the creation of the national grid system of square townships—that all new states were to measure “not less than one hundred and fifty miles square, or as near thereto as circumstances permit.” Even now, when boundaries have no great symbolic value, Frenchmen derive satisfaction from the beautifully hexagonal shape of their country.

Still, there are other than esthetic grounds for cherishing the visibility of a space. Spaces have a way of underscoring or calling attention to their content. “Property makes the man visible and accessible. I cannot see a man’s mind or his character. But when I see what he has chosen and what he does with it, I know what he likes, and quite a good deal about his principles.”

This sounds a little like nineteenth-century Illinois: Farmer Thrifty standing proudly in front of his big red barn. But it probably had its equivalent in Attica and Republican Rome and perhaps in ancient China too. In those vanished landscapes there must have been the same well-kept farms, neither too large nor too small, the same tight-knit, hardworking families, the same countryside of square fields; everything square in all senses of the word, with every good quality and every limitation associated with squareness.

We are well aware that this landscape has all but seen its day, and not a few are glad to see the last of it; we find it too commonplace for greatness. Perhaps; but whatever the shapes and spaces and patterns predominating in the American landscape of the future there will surely come a time when we will learn to perceive those spaces as symbols of continuity and order, and when our eye suddenly rediscover it in landscape beauty of the element kind that transcends history.

On the Road

The best known of highway systems is the one which evolved in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here, for the first time, we meet with a well-defined program of road building to serve both the political and economic interests of a nation. The vast and impressive system of highways, most of them centered on Paris, linked important agricultural regions with ports and the centers of distribution, and at the same time established the authority of the king and his army in remote and sometimes rebellious regions.

The physical features of the French highway system are worth noting, for they not only resemble in many respects those of the Roman and Persian and Inca systems, but suggest how we might possibly classify roads in terms of their impact on the social order. The first step in the planning of the pre-
revolutionary network was to define the right of way: to lay out broad,
straight roads with wide, open margins; and whereas most local travel was
confined to the rivers and valleys where the villages were located, the new
highways deliberately followed the crests of hills and the higher elevations.
This for three reasons: the soil here was firmer and less disturbed by floods
and marshes, highways located on the heights were less likely to become
involved in local traffic and problems of expropriation of farmland; and
finally, they were more visible. The parallel rows of poplars which the au-
torities planted became conspicuous elements in the landscape and_re-
minded everyone of the power of the crown. Only within the last generation
have we come to recognize the beauty of these broad, straight highways,
undulating over the hills and open country, with their perspective of trees;
and though the romantic nineteenth century found them monotonous and
artificial and empty of life, the French government has recently declared some
of these highways national monuments.

Since it was not the intention of these royal roads to serve the small
communities in the valleys, they had little or no connection with the sur-
rounding rural landscape. The sparse traffic on the highways was composed
of coaches, caravans of wholesale merchants, military and official travelers,
whereas in the nearby countryside, a totally different kind of activity pre-
vailed. A French geographer describes the situation in the eighteenth
century:

The villages are isolated, the roads in a bad state, poorly laid out or even entirely
lacking. The bridges are in ruins, the farm produce cannot be moved, whereas
downstream there is a lack of food. . . . The local road system, the instinctive and
anonymous work of generations . . . covers the countryside with a maze of innum-
erable roads, paths, and trails. The royal highways pass through, sometimes
destroying the network, sometimes using it, at times avoiding it and crossing
deserted moors or forests empty of inhabitants, at others bypassing populated
regions, villages, even large towns and small cities which are obliged to link up to
the royal highways by means of makeshift roads.23

These royal highways—Roman, Persian, Inca, French—have in common a
preference for the straight perspective, disregarding topography for greater
visibility and a shorter alignment. They bypass or avoid the local landscapes
and their communities and head straight for the political or commercial or
military destination. All of them, in one manner or another, restrict their
traffic to a small and powerful group of users—either by edict, by ac-
ceptibility, or by their destination. We are likely to compare our own inter-
state system to the system of royal highways, and there are obvious simi-
larities. But I suspect that an odologist would put the interstate in a very
different category and point out that it was never intended as a political
device to reinforce or change the social order.

How does a highway system accomplish these objectives? It can bring
people together and create something like a public place for face-to-face
interaction and discussion. Those royal highways made it easy only for a
certain class in society to come together: officials and political, religious, and
military leaders: they could meet and transact public business at selected
centers; mobility thus fostered the growth of an effective and powerful ruling
group. But the rank and file, particularly those in the countryside, were
doomed to immobility and to political inaction.

So an essential element in any healthy political landscape is the network of
neighborhood or rural roads. This truth is strangely ignored by scholars. In a
typical regional geography you will rarely run across any lengthy discussion
of the local road system. Bad roads, we are constantly (and rightly) informed,
hindrance the economy; but we could also define a bad road as one which
leads only to the place of work or one which makes sociability difficult or
unrewarding; a bad road, speaking in ideological terms, is one which provides
us with no sense of rewarding destination.

The United States offers one of the largest and most ambitious examples of
a nation once so politically minded that it was determined that every
citizen, every landowner should have easy access to a road leading to the
political center. We can still see the results of that policy, now unfortunately
neglected, in the grid system.

Altogether the grid system covers two-thirds of the United States; all
except the thirteen original states, Kentucky, and parts of Ohio and Georgia.
It divides the country into square miles, or sections, and these are in turn
combined into townships of thirty-six sections. One of the distinctive fea-
tures of the system is that every section, every square mile, is in theory
bordered on all four sides by public roads. In practice there are vast areas in
the West where no such roads exist; but there is legal provision for creating
them if and when that becomes necessary.

The purpose of these roads—which in the beginning were totally unim-
proved and almost nonexistent—was to provide every landowner with a
means to get to the nearest town in order to vote, pay taxes, go to church, go
to court, attend lectures—most of these being political events. Eventually
these roads were reinterpreted in economic terms: as leading to market or to
a shipping point, and that is the way we still think of them. A farm to market
road is an extremely useful thing, but it is not the same as a farm to country
courthouse road.

We know that parts of the back country of the United States are not very
lively. Many houses have been abandoned or are being used as barns for baled
alfalfa; farms have been consolidated. The back roads, heirs of the grid system
of almost two hundred years ago, are usually unpaved. They stretch straight
ahead, up and down hill, mile after mile; dusty, unattractive, punctuated by
tipsy mailboxes and sagging telephone lines; but not quite lifeless, because
The Other Landscape

Before we take leave of the political landscape, the landscape designed to produce law-abiding citizens, honest officials, eloquent orators, and patriotic soldiers, let us have a final glimpse of it. Here is a description or survey of Italy in the last years of the Roman Empire, written in the third century A.D. by Tertullian, one of the greatest of early Christian writers. The irony of the passage is that while it seems to assume that the civilized world will endure forever, it was actually composed about a century before the barbarians invaded the Empire and destroyed that particular landscape and substituted another, quite different one.

All places are now accessible, all are well known, all open to commerce; most pleasant farms have obliterated all traces of what were once dreary and dangerous wastes; cultivated fields have subdued forests; flocks and herds have expelled wild beasts; sandy deserts are sown; rocks are planted; marshes are drained; and where once were hardly solitary cottages, there are now large cities. No longer are [savage] islands feared, nor their rocky shores feared; everywhere are houses, and inhabitants, and settled government, and civilized life.

Some of the features which Tertullian thinks well of are precisely those which environmentalists condemn: forests replaced by plowed fields, wildlife destroyed, marshes drained, cities taking the place of wilderness, and all parts of the countryside accessible to commerce. It is certainly not an exciting landscape; it may even have been monotonous. Yet it must have been impressive; for it made visible two qualities very uncommon in those remote times and by no means universal even now: order and prosperity. It was a livable landscape, it was an achievement, socially speaking; and what I am here concerned with is not the landscape which the artist or geographer or archologist finds unique, but the landscape which shows us how people try to strike a balance between their need to get along with one another and their need to adjust to the environment, and survive. We never completely succeed and often overdo the human aspect of the problem. But we cannot overlook the fact that almost every utopian version of a more perfect world starts out by proposing a political infrastructure—the equitable division of land, the town as center of government, the defensible boundary. All social philosophers from Plato to Thomas More to Lewis Mumford have stipulated those landscape features. I am no admirer of utopian writing, yet insofar as each of us is, to a greater or lesser degree, a political animal, we respond to utopian ideals: the family farm, the dignified place of public assembly and interaction; and we like to think of boundaries and divisions protecting small communities and insuring justice.

Only when we think about the private, the more emotional side of existence do we find something missing in the political landscape. It is time therefore to explore that alternative landscape, the one in which we feel at
home as inhabitants of the earth. The contrast between the two is clear: man, the political animal, thinks of the landscape as his own creation, as belonging to him; thinks of it as a well-defined territory or domain which confers on him a status totally distinct from that of all other creatures; whereas man the inhabitant sees the landscape as a habitat which was there long before he appeared. He sees himself as belonging to the landscape in the sense that he is its product. Yet the two points of view have this in common: they see the landscape as something shared; they assume that human beings cannot survive and fulfill themselves unless there is a landscape to hold them together in a group.

If we were to ask ourselves why we believed that we were inhabitants of the earth we would have little trouble finding an answer: we belong here because human beings are part of the natural order, related to all other forms of life, responding to much the same laws, and no less dependent on a healthy and diverse environment. This condition of being part of nature brings with it certain responsibilities and restraints. To damage a system which allows an infinite number of life forms to coexist, to destroy what we cannot possibly replace, would not only be irresponsible, it would threaten our own survival. Therefore, the first of our obligations is to discover the laws of nature and follow them; we can then lead secure and creative lives and contribute to the well-being of the earth and its inhabitants. Then to show our dedication we would tell what we had been doing to save energy, protect wildlife, raise organic vegetables, and how we had been practicing handicrafts and following certain spiritual disciplines.

This would be an honest answer, but not in itself much of a philosophical statement. It merely implies that if we want to survive (never mind what for) we had better obey the rules of the game. But as we know, there are other, more earnest ways of justifying our close relationship with and dependence on the natural environment. It is typical of our times that we turn for an answer to the psychologist, the ecologist, not the theologian. It is also typical that we are more concerned with establishing a harmonious and fruitful relation with nature in its broadest sense than with the landscape, which in the not so distant past was the site of lifelong daily contact with the natural world. We use the somewhat shopworn phrase child of nature to indicate the desired status and way of life. But long before there was such a concept as nature (which in the current sense of country as opposed to the town dates from the late eighteenth century) the phrase most used was child of the earth.

We are most of us familiar with the myth identifying the earth as the mother of all forms of life. This is no mere figure of speech as when we refer to our country as the motherland or to our college as alma mater. On the contrary, the myth makes it plain that the first human beings came out of the womb of the Earth Mother. Among the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest there are several versions of this Emergence Myth: they all tell of two sisters who dwelt in a dark water cave until a godlike emissary—sometimes the Spider Woman, the link between worlds—showed them how to emerge from their cave into the world of trees and grass and wait for the sun to come up. In the Pueblo of Acoma the account reads, "[T]hey came out of the earth, from Iyatiku, the mother. They came out through a hole in the north called Shipap. They crawled out like grasshoppers; their bodies were naked and soft. It was all dark; the sun had not yet risen."

"That human beings are the offspring of the earth is a world-wide article of faith," Mircea Eliade writes.

In many languages man is called "born of the earth." Let us choose a few random examples. The Armenians call the Earth "the maternal womb, from which issued men." In numerous languages man is called "born of the earth." Among the Peruvians the earth is called Earth Mother. It is believed that children come "from the depths of the Earth," from caves, grottos, crevices, but also from marshes and springs and streams. Every region of Europe, almost every town or village knows of a rock or spring which brings children.

He adds:

We must be on our guard not to think of these superstitions or metaphors as meant only for children. Reality is more complex. Until recently there persisted among Europeans the obscure awareness of a mystic solidarity with the land of one's birth. It was not a commonplace love of country or province; it was not admiration of a familiar landscape or veneration of ancestors buried, generation after generation, around the village church. It was something entirely different: the mystic experience of autochthon, of being indigenous, the profound sense of having emerged from the local ground, the sense that the earth had given birth to us, much as it had given birth, in its inexhaustible fertility, to rocks and streams and flowers. The obscure memory of a pre-existence in the womb of the earth has had significant consequences. It has produced among men and women a feeling of cosmic relatedness to the environment; one could even say that at one period men were less aware of belonging to the human species than of a kind of cosmic-biologic participation in the life of their landscape. This sort of experience produced a mystic link with place, whose intensity is still echoed in folklore and popular tradition. But this mystic solidarity was not without consequences. It prevented among men the feeling of being creators. In legitimizing his children who "arrived" from some part of the Cosmos, the father did not have children of his own, properly speaking, only new members of the family, new implements for work.

Two items in these remarks of Eliade's are worth pondering when we speculate about the kind of landscape created by man the inhabitant: the first is the assumption, persuasive but of course impossible to verify, that early men adopted an essentially passive attitude toward all aspects of creation and saw themselves simply as recipients of Mother Earth's bounty. The second, much more significant, is this: that our fundamental relationship with the natural environment was strictly confined to one place, one familiar ancestral landscape and in no way included the whole earth or even the neighboring
landscape. Our own landscape was unique in its sacred origin, and we in consequence among all peoples were unique.

Natural Spaces

These two landscapes—the political and the one which for brevity's sake I call the inhabited landscape—in real life are always found together. As a usual thing the political landscape is on a larger, more impressive scale, more permanent and easier to spot, whereas the inhabited landscape is likely to be poor and small and hard to find. But both of them, in one degree or another, are always there, and it is only when we discuss them in the abstract that we are able to separate them.

Yet they do differ, and not only in appearance or what for the lack of a better term I refer to as spatial organization, but in their underlying purpose, and I would tentatively say that while the political landscape is deliberately created in order to make it possible for men to live in a just society, the inhabited landscape merely evolves in the course of our trying to live on harmonious terms with the natural world surrounding us. I would add that this second kind of landscape is much the older and still the most common; indeed I believe it is once again coming into fashion as more and more of us feel a new attachment to the natural order. The attitude of the Navaho is that "on the road of life to his final destiny, which will make man one with the universe, he is concerned with maintaining harmony with all things, with subsistence and the orderly replenishment of his own kind." This philosophy, expressed in scientific terms, is far from alien to that of many contemporary environmentalists. It is when we try translating the point of view into a landscape that difficulties arise. For there are many different kinds of inhabited landscapes, different ways of adjusting to the natural order, just as there are many different kinds of political landscapes. The one which concerns us here is totally unlike the landscape of the nomadic Navahos, for it is the product of untold generations of farmers equipped with axes and plows and their own notions of how to adapt to the natural environment. In his analysis of what he calls the Gemeinschaft (or the traditional pretechnological community) the German sociologist Tönnies provides us with a glimpse of the traditional inhabited landscape of Europe of say four centuries ago.

The people see themselves surrounded by the inhabited earth. It seems as if, in the beginning of time, the earth itself had brought forth from its womb the human beings who look upon her as their mother. The land supports their tents and houses, and the more durable the houses become, the more men become attached to their own ground, however limited. The relationship grows stronger and deeper when the land is cultivated. With the plow plowing the soil, nature is tamed just as the animals of the woods are domesticated. But this is only the result of the ever-renewed efforts of countless generations where every step in progress is handed down from father to son. The area settled and occupied is therefore a common heritage, the land of the ancestors toward which all feel and act as descendants and blood brothers. In this sense, it can be regarded as a living substance which, with its spiritual or psychological values, persists in the everlasting flux of its elements, viz., the human beings... Habit, next to the ties of blood, forms the strongest bond among contemporaries, and likewise, memory links the living to the dead. The homeland, as the embodiment of dear memories, holds the heart of man, who parts from it with sorrow and looks back to it with homesickness and longing from abroad... Even in times of nomadic wandering, family and home are the source of such sentiment... The metaphysical character of the clan, the tribe, the village and town community is, so to speak, wedded to the land in a lasting union.

For most of us this picture of the traditional community will have a strong appeal, for it seems to confirm our vision of our more distant European past and to reinforce what Romantic art and literature, and even household legends and fairytales, have told us about a way of life that was simpler and in many respects more intimate. But is that not largely because we are seeing it from the perspective of more than two hundred years of radical change? In actuality that traditional inhabited landscape achieved a coherent form only after generations of unrest and confusion. Almost by definition an inhabited landscape is the product of incessant adaptation and conflict: adaptation to what is often a new and bewildering natural environment, conflict between groups of people with very dissimilar views as to how to make that adaptation. The political landscape, artificial though it may be, is the realization of an archetype, of a coherent design inspired by philosophy or religion, and it has a distinct purpose in view. But the inhabited landscape is, to use a much distorted word, an existential landscape: it achieves its identity only in the course of existence. Only when it ceases to evolve can we say what it is.

Tönnies was, of course, chiefly interested in the final form of the traditional community and its landscape. He has nothing to say about the repeated confrontations, environmental as well as social, that took place from the very first moment of settlement. Nevertheless those were part of the story of the landscape, and we can see their scars even now; for if the landscape is often divided and analyzed into natural or topographical spaces—and the tendency to do this is becoming stronger—instead of into political or "civic" spaces, that is because the landscape is now interpreted as a way of adapting to the natural order.

Speaking of land ownership in the earliest Germanic communities, Jacob Grimm observes that the population lives by raising livestock and by farming... Now it is obvious that for the herder land which is undivided and under group control is desirable, while the farmer prefers individual control. The herder needs established pasturage, meadows and forest for grazing and mast; his livestock thrive only by being held together in one place. To the farmer the best piece of land is the one surrounding his homestead
that he can fence and from which he can exclude all outsiders. He plows the land by himself and the prosperity of his farm depends solely on his own efforts. . . . Thus we see divided property and property operated jointly side by side, the undivided, collectively exploited holding being the older and the obsolete.28

So the original landscape which the settlers take over is seen as a composition of natural spaces, some suited to farming, some suited to grazing, others covered with wood and brush, but all of them, when seen together, suited to communal exploitation. None of the spaces is actually unchangeable as to size or shape. Flexible boundaries are a hallmark of the inhabited landscape, for as the community grows, as its economy shifts from stock-raising to farming or vice versa, or one or another of the spaces decreases in value, then a shift, a gradual spatial reorganization ensues. But essentially these are the spaces those early migrants or settlers always looked for: land for grazing and land for farming. In fact they had four spaces in mind: for the site of the village, for arable, for livestock, and finally forest; but forest was omnipresent and in any case it was valued more for its grass than for its wood. As for the village site, that was understood. This is why, throughout the centuries of European history, we hear of the need for two spaces: deeds and leases and petitions for land for settlement mention them in English or French or Latin or German.

Lalouage et pasturage, aeger and salus, Allmen [the woods and wasteland open to collective exploitation by the village community] and Gewannen [the areas of cultivation]. . . . The combination seems in effect to be constant and fundamental throughout the Middle Ages. Three concentric zones, so to speak, the enclosed village, the space devoted to raising grain, and finally the large belt left uncultivated, such was the image of the village of his childhood kept by the author of the Annales Cameracenses toward the end of the 12th century. Three zones where the human presence thins out as it moves from the inhabited center, but three zones equally useful, equally sustaining.29

For many centuries the tripartite division of the landscape remained a reality. In the seventeenth century, when Englishmen arrived in New England they organized their towns or villages in strict accordance with the old system. Each qualified inhabitant of a new settlement was granted, in addition to a home lot in the village itself, a portion of meadow, a portion of land for tillage, and a woodlot. And although the prompt decay of the traditional open field system in the colony and the development of private farms independently operated put an end to the search for village self-sufficiency, the belief that every farm should automatically contain meadow, field, and woodland remained as strong as ever. The New England Farmer or Geographical Dictionary, compiled in 1797, recommended that "lots designed chiefly for tillage should be nearest to the house and barn . . . the mowing lots for pasture should be contrived to be next, and the woodlots furthest of all lots from the

house." The reason offered for each location was convenience and the saving of labor. Even so, the old medieval hierarchy of spaces, the system of three concentric zones was still discernable.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the almost total reorganization of the American farm, its increasing mechanization, its emphasis on one commercial crop, and the declining usefulness of the woodlot opened the eyes of most farmers to the impracticability of the old three-part division.

We have now devised entirely new ways of classifying land—an indication, I think, that we have gone a long way toward formulating a new definition of the landscape itself.

The Forest, Its Rise and Fall

In the traditional medieval concept of the universe the whole world was likewise divided into three spaces: one was where men lived and where they created their own defined spaces—gardens and plowed fields. A second was the open space where cattle grazed and where there were no fences, and a third space was everything beyond. In Latin these were called, respectively, aeger, salus, and silva: "horrida silva," according to Tacitus. In English they were village and arable (or landscape in the strict sense of the word), grazing or common or wasteland (including woodland), and then wilderness.

Forest is a relatively new word, and we ought not use it at this juncture, for we are attempting to see the world as the peasant of the Dark Ages saw it. Where we see a familiar and beautiful element, the forest, he saw wilderness. Wood and woodlot and wood all derive from wild, meaning lawless and unpredictable. Even so, we cannot always be sure of how in those times the word was being used. Sometimes wood signified a forest mountain range, as with the Böhmerwald in Germany. Sometimes it signified a boundary, a protective zone. But the original basic meaning of wood usually prevailed: wilderness or even desert. If we turn to Latin we find (as we might expect) a greater variety of words for wooded areas with specialized functions, but still no word for a forest. Silva (from which we get savage) usually indicated wilderness or primeval forest—definitely not part of the human landscape. Nemus was a park or an artificial plantation, a lucus was a sacred grove. Salus in medieval charters meant woodland with grazing. It seems originally to have indicated a mountain pass, and since Romans associated such passes with forested mountains, the word meant both forest and frontier. Eventually, however, salus came to mean a pasture where there were trees, something like an open range.

In legendary times in northern Europe the great mass of the wilderness (or forest), the seemingly endless reaches of trees and vegetation and inaccessible mountainsides and valleys remained untouched. It was seen, two thousand and more years ago, simply as wilderness; a vast, featureless, inhospitable
region not unlike the open sea in its terrors. "The absence of large-scale clearing cannot simply be explained by the technical incompetence of the Germans," an historian remarks.

They valued the primeval forest: it was impassable and untouchable. There were great frontier stretches of forest between the tribes. The heart of the forest was the seat of the Godhead; there it displayed its awe; there it claimed sacrifice and humble submission. . . . We cannot say that this ominous atmosphere absolutely forbade the pushing of settlement into the woods. But it was a hindrance, and is at least evidence that the Germans looked on the woodland in whose midst they dwelt as an unchangeable thing.30

Still, there was clearly a distinction made, even in the remotest times, between the heart of the primeval forest, what could be termed the "heroic" forest associated with myth and mythic divinities, and the everyday or folk forest which each community needed in its tripartite landscape. And for this relatively insignificant part of the forest there existed a name. March is a word now little used; it refers to a border area or boundary. In Gothic times it seems to have meant both boundary and forest, and it is easy to understand how this could have been the case. When communities were little more than oases in the midst of the northern wilderness, the edge of the surrounding

forest was identified with the community frontier; seen as a landmark, a feature of some sanctity, not to be violated, so the original meaning of march or mark was forest, and specifically the edge of the forest where the trees had been thinned out and where the cattle grazed. The word is clearly related to margin and merge—and even marky.

Here a different terminology can help us. If we see the forest as a distinct ecological entity we then define that margin as a degraded forest environment, an example of mismanagement and abuse. But if, instead of that, we see the forest simply as wilderness, then the margin clearly does not belong in it. It becomes salus, grazing land; march, a word meaning both woodland and frontier, an essential space since it contained an abundance of resources: herbs, wild fruit, game, raw materials for many crafts, wood for fuel and for building, and above all, stands of grass. "Forests also hath Britain," Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote in the twelfth century, "filled with every manner of wild deer, in the glades whereof growth grass that the cattle may find therein change of pasture." At a period when cultivated grasses were unknown and grasses of any sort had to compete with weeds, these grassgrown glades—or lawns as they were called—were much prized. Yet most of the feed for the livestock consisted of branches of foliage cut from the forest trees—a practice which had the effect of making the forest margin even more open.

Only a southern farmer can really understand the concept of woodland as grazing land. To this day we can observe in the rural parts of the South cows and hogs and even horses wandering and grazing at will in what used to be called waste: abandoned fields, cut-over woods, the margins of roads and highways, much as animals did in northern Europe more than a thousand years ago. The custom is one of the last reminders in America of a time when forest (or wilderness) was not a part of that composition of defined spaces known as a landscape, when the very word forest was all but unknown to the average Englishman. It came into existence in courtly circles in the ninth century to identify a part of the wilderness set aside for the king's hunting. The word, H. C. Darby informs us, "is neither a botanical nor a geographical term, but a legal term. It implied land outside (foris) the common law and subject to a special law that safeguarded the king's hunting. Forest and woodland were thus not synonymous terms, for the forested areas included land that was neither wood or waste, and they sometimes included whole counties. Even so, a forested area usually contained some wood and often large tracts of wood.31

However restrictive its original meaning might have been, the invention of this word marks one of the first steps in what can be called the discovery or the creation of the forest as a distinct ecological entity. For then it began to be seen as part of the life—social, economic, ecological, and spiritual—of every Atlantic landscape. The history of this discovery is a separate and as yet
unwritten chapter in landscape studies. It starts with the legal definition, more than a millennium ago, of the forest as a political space, a space with its own special law. At an early date three—even four—kinds of forests were created, each with its own special legal status: the royal forest, the chase, the park, and the warren. The clearly defined forest, the forest as a visible element in the rural countryside distinct from open farmland, probably dates from the sixteenth century; according to a forest historian, "A firm boundary between forest and field did not exist before the 14th century. Men set fire to parts of the forest whenever it was convenient, planted grain for a year or two, and when the soil no longer produced a crop, abandoned the clearing, and the woods grew back again."

Perhaps it is premature to lament the passing of the old-fashioned multipurpose forest, small, mismanaged, and open to everyone: hunters, botanists, woodcutters, poetic searches after Waldensamkeit (the solitude of the forest), stray cows. Yet it sometimes seems as if it were being replaced by a multitude of scientifically organized special purpose forests: commercial forests of a single kind of tree, forests for public recreation with informative signs on the trees, forests for watershed management, flood control, forests as model ecosystems, forests as sound barriers, forests as works of art, but no more forest as such. And when that happens the word itself will be abandoned as lacking in precision, and we will be back once more to the medieval woodland margin; only it will be the margin of the highway.

**Mobility and Immobility**

Despite our strong emotional attachment to these inhabited landscapes and what they once meant to us, it is far from easy to grasp their essential characteristics, and when it is a matter of interpreting them in terms of space, I confess I am often at a loss. But the shifting status of the forest can perhaps provide a clue, for it long played a dominant role in our landscape history.

Geographically speaking, that role has been thoroughly investigated. We have learned through a variety of archeological techniques how and when and where the forests covering much of Atlantic Europe were fragmented, reduced in extent, and how their exploitation became increasingly efficient and destructive. What we know much less about is the manner in which our perception, our definition of the forest has changed over the centuries, and how we discovered and explored the forest and its resources and finally integrated it in the man-made landscape.

How are we to chronicle that intellectual process? It is much as if, in prehistoric times, a mist, a primal cloud of the unknowing had slowly started to dissipate, revealing first of all the limitless and terrifying atmosphere of wilderness surrounding the inhabited world, then the more clearly defined space, the wilderness composed of wooded mountains, a frontier protection against chaos. Finally comes the exploitation of the woodland margin, a zone where livestock were grazed and wood for building and burning was collected. In the twelfth century there are signs that the wilderness is being defined no longer as frontier, as march, but as part of the village territory, which gradually expands as the marginal woodland is eroded. It was perhaps some three centuries later that villagers and others learned to see the wilderness from a new perspective, borrowed the word forest, established boundaries, and (in short) tamed and humanized this tree-grown space, so that it became a fraction of the village landscape, essentially no different in status from the field or the common.

But the stage that interests us is that in which the forest is first perceived as a natural space used in common by all members of the village. The forest or woodland belongs to everyone. "Property in land begins with possession in common," Grimm observes, "the forest in which I picked an apple, the meadow where I graze my cattle, belongs to us. The land which we defend against enemies, belongs to us; soil and earth, the air in which we live—no one can own even a fragment of these for himself. They are owned in common; like fire and water they belong to all."

Thus the distinct natural spaces—meadow, moor, forest, etc., as well as the four elements—can never be permanently divided into individual holdings. Specifically, no individual using them can build a fence around any portion of them. In fact the only permanent walls or fences in the inhabited landscape are those surrounding an area sanctified by myth: the site of the original homesteads, the village itself as a built-up area, the communal fields, and the meadow. Within the forest (as it begins to be exploited) only temporary fences, such as those around grazing areas or a stand of valuable trees, are allowed. The locations of permanent boundaries are established by means of what seem to us to be haphazard procedures—the throwing of a hammer, the flight of a chicken, the distance a sound could carry, etc.—intended to symbolize their divine, inscrutable nature. When walls or fences are not practicable, as in the boundaries of a whole community, then stone markers or certain long-lived trees are planted.

This sort of boundary—religious and unchangeable in character, periodically verified and solemnly rededicated—is very much what we saw in the political landscape, and insofar as it is intended to define a permanent space—village or commons—it has its political aspect here. But within this more or less rigid network of boundaries there exists a vast number of smaller spaces constantly shifting in shape and size. These are the plots of ground farmed by the villagers, the short-term enclosures in the forest or the meadow; and even the pieces of land occupied by the more modest houses—altogether comprising much the greater part of the village and arable. We are thus in that part of the inhabited landscape where change and mobility are the rule.

In the medieval European landscape—and briefly in the seventeenth-cen-
tury landscape of New England—these farmed plots were assembled in two, sometimes three, large fields called open fields because none of those plots was fenced, even though the fields themselves were. The field is one of the most elusive spaces in the landscape and requires some definition, for it differs in meaning in every landscape period.

Now commonly defined as “a cultivated open expanse of land, usually devoted to one crop,” it was a natural space in the inhabited landscape, like forest or moor. The word derives from an Indo-European root, pele, meaning a flat, open space, as can be seen in related words like plains, palm of the hand, and Poland. Even in the early Middle Ages feild meant “land free from wood, lying on downs and moors, or sometimes in the open spaces of the forest.”

As a natural space it was therefore community property and was surrounded by a fence or hedge. It was, as I say, divided into sometimes hundreds of individual parcels, used (but not owned) by the various households in the village. Though they were of different shapes and sizes they were hard to distinguish one from another, for in every field the same crops were grown, and none of them contained any tree or perennial plant, or any structure, nor were there any roads, any communal spaces or installations in the fields to serve the innumerable parcels of land: a strictly utilitarian uniform collection of spaces.

But for several understandable reasons this pattern of parcels within each field underwent constant change: sometimes because of divisions brought about by inheritance, sometimes by consolidation, sometimes because of a gradual shift in boundary as a neighbor surreptitiously plowed one more furrow. After a few generations there was often such distortion and confusion that a drastic reorganization of the spaces was called for. Since most of these changes were unrecorded, and the land transactions among the tenants were verbal, never documented, scholars have found it all but impossible to chronicle them, much less interpret them, and in any case there were economic and technological reasons for the mobility. Writing about the Continental landscape in the very early Middle Ages, Marc Bloch says:

The arable land from which the village derived its sustenance was necessarily much larger in proportion to the number of inhabitants than it is today. For agriculture was a great devourer of space. In the tilled fields, incompletely plowed and almost always inadequately manured, the ears of [wheat] grew neither very heavy nor very dense. Above all, the harvests never covered the whole area of cultivation at once. The most advanced systems of crop-rotation known to the age required that every year half or a third of the cultivated soil should lie fallow. Often indeed, fallow and crops followed each other in irregular alternation, which allowed more time for the growth of weeds than for that of the cultivated produce; the fields, in such cases, represented hardly more than a provisional and short-lived conquest of the wasteland, and even in the heart of agricultural regions nature tended constantly to regain the upper hand. Beyond them, enveloping them, thrusting into them, spread

forest, scrub and dunes—immense wilderness, seldom entirely uninhabited by man, though whoever dwelt there as a charcoal-burner, shepherd, hermit or outlaw did so only at the cost of a long separation from his fellow men.

Nor was this spatial fluidity confined to the open fields. Most of the roads—strictly speaking “rights of way”—in the inhabited landscape were temporary spaces designed for temporary use. Village authorities would designate a strip of land for the hauling of wood from the forest or for driving cattle to the village. Once these tasks were accomplished the road ceased to have any legal existence.

Braudel mentions the “relative mobility of villages and hamlets” in the later Middle Ages. “They grew up, expanded, contracted, and also shifted their sites. Sometimes these ‘desertions’ were total and final. . . . More often the center of gravity within a given cultural area shifted, and everything—furniture, people, animals, stones—was moved out of the abandoned village to a site a few kilometers away. Even the form of the village could change in the course of these vicissitudes.”

In ancient Germanic law, the house or cottage counted as movable goods. The term also included a great variety of things: livestock, household goods, weapons, bees, and even certain vegetable products. Thus in some landscapes mobile property included grass (and crops) moved by the wind and branches blown down from trees. Grimm tells us that in a certain part of Germany fruit growing in the country was considered immobile, whereas buildings, hedges, fences, and implements were considered movable; on the other hand masonry walls and anything built with nails were considered attached to the earth and immovable. One of the complications in studying the inhabited landscape is that each region, each village is likely to have its own unwritten laws and customs, and such unwritten laws and customs will vary over time and apply to one class in the population and not to another. Generally speaking, mobile property was the only possession of women, minors, and those of the lowest social status; only free men (however defined) were entitled to own land—presumably inherited from a remote legendary ancestor. The average peasant could only use land belonging to others, and then only the surface, to raise a movable crop or graze his mobile livestock. Ancient Greece made a similar distinction in kinds of ownership, but it was not between mobile and immobile; it was between invisible and visible—visible signifying what was permanent.

Nature, Tame and Wild

In another of his composite period landscapes Ruskin describes the landscape of the Middle Ages as depicted in medieval art. But we are given few details of the everyday, “mobile” world, for the perspective is that of the nobleman,
and the medieval nobleman, unlike his peers in Classical antiquity, had no
taste for work or the place of work; above all no taste or tolerance for the
workers themselves. Viewed, therefore, from the castle heights,
the pleasant flatland is never a ploughed field, nor a rich lotus meadow good for
pasture, but green ground covered with flowers, and divided by fragrant hedges,
with a castle in the middle of it. The aspers are delighted in, not because they
are good for "coach-making men" to make cart-wheels of, but because they are shady
and graceful; and the fruit trees, covered with delicious fruit, especially apple
and orange, occupy still more important positions in the scenery. . . . And the ideal
occupation of mankind is not to cultivate either the garden or the meadow, but to
gather roses and eat oranges in the one, and ride out hawking over the other. 86

Ruskin summarizes the aristocratic feeling toward nature: "Love of
the garden instead of love of the farm . . . Loss of sense of actual Divine pres-
ence, leading to fancies of fallacious animation, in herbs, flowers, etc. per-
petual and more or less undisturbed companionship with wild nature."

Much depends, I would say, on how wild the nature was. We have a good
example of an inhabited landscape in the American Southwest, where the
Pueblo Indians have established and maintained over the centuries a very
satisfactory companionship with the environment. But that is because both
parties display the same measure and predictability and willingness to cooper-
ate. The complexity of the Southwest is strictly geological; in terms of habi-
tability it is simplicity itself: there has to be water and sun, there has to be a
dependable calendar, and there has to be space. The Pueblo people are partial
to clear-cut distinctions in society, in time, and in space, and as a result they
have created a very efficient inhabited landscape. "The Zuni Indians," said
Ruth Benedict,
do not picture the universe, as we do, as a conflict of good and evil. They are not
dualistic . . . . It is difficult for us to lay aside our picture of the universe as a
struggle between good and evil and see it as the Pueblos see it. They do not see the
seasons, nor man's life, as a race run by life and death. . . . The seasons unroll. Life
is always present, death is always present . . . . Like their version of man's relation to
other men, their version of man's relation to the cosmos gives no place to heroism
and man's will to overcome obstacles . . . . They have made, in one small but long-
established cultural island in North America, a civilization whose forms are dictated
by the typical choices of the Apollonian, all of whose delight is in formality and
whose way of life is the way of measure and sobriety. 87

This could never be said of the medieval landscape of northern Europe—an
inhabited landscape like that of the Pueblo Indians insofar as it was the
expression of a desire to come to terms with its environment. No doubt the
medieval inhabitants were different to start with, but we cannot ignore the
quality of the environment they confronted: the long, dark winters making
for solitude and introspection, the sudden liberating spring when all living
things are growing and moving and starting afresh. And of course there is the
omnipresent forest, the place of myth and death and freedom; somehow or
other it has to be dealt with, and a sense of uncertainty, totally absent from
the Pueblo relationship, enters the picture, a sense that "history" will eventually
take over. The giants which haunt the forest are bitterly resentful
of man's presence and take particular pains to destroy church bellfries—sym-
boles of a new faith and of an ordering of time, and even elves, much more
numerous, much more friendly, and often very helpful, lament the disap-
pearance of the forest and the spread of farming. Their cry, "Our king is
dead," is sometimes heard in the remoter woodlands. If any superstition
could be said to epitomize that early and transient relationship between an
illiterate society and its environment it would be the widespread belief in the
existence of the Little People. Any firmly held belief in the invisible, it seems
to me, must somehow affect our attitude toward the visible world, and what
might have been little more than a random plundering and destruction of the
nearby wilderness became an exchange of benefits: those things which men
took from the forest for their daily needs were repaid by our helping and
protecting and loving the small, invisible creatures who lived there. They
served as intermediaries, they reassured us that we were taking part in the
natural order and were not entirely alien to it.

Despite their small size—the true elf is never taller than a four-year-old
child (but then that was the height ascribed by the Middle Ages to angels as
well)—elves had many affinities with man, and because of all creatures only
they and man were created directly by God, they dreamed of being admitted to
heaven. "Through the whole existence of elves, nixes and goblins," Grimm
writes,
there runs a low undercurrent of the unsatisfied, disconsolate: they do not rightly
know how to turn their glorious gifts to account, they always require to lean upon
man . . . . though acquainted in a higher degree than men with the hidden virtues of
stones and herbs, they yet evoke human aid for their sick and their women in labor,
they borrow men's vessels for baking and brewing, they even celebrate their wed-
dings and high times in the halls of men. Hence too their doubting whether they
can be partakers of salvation, and their unconcealed grief when a negative answer is
given. 88

Habitat and Habit

This close, never-ceasing relationship with the environment is typical of every
inhabited landscape, whether it is Pueblo or northern European or African,
but we need to remind ourselves that the relationship is confined to one
particular environment, which means that all other environments no matter
how similar (as in the case of the Pueblo Indians) are excluded—and so are their inhabitants. The political landscape is indifferent to the topography and culture of the territories it takes over, but the inhabited landscape sees itself as the center of the world, an oasis of order in the surrounding chaos, inhabited by the People. Insularity is what gives it character; size, wealth, beauty have nothing to do with it; it is a law unto itself.

Actually not a law, but a set of habits and customs accumulated over the centuries, each the outcome of a slow adaptation to place—to the local topography and weather and soil, and to the people, the superfamily which lived there: a special accent, a special way of dressing, a special form of greeting; special dances and holidays—all the picturesque idiosyncracies that are the stuff of tourist folklore, and then some: passwords and gestures, taboos and secrets—secret places and secret events that exclude the outsider more effectively than any boundary. Strange how many of these customs, these ways of identifying an inhabited landscape and its inhabitants are sensory: the unmistakable taste of a local dish or a local wine, the smell of certain seasons, the sound of a local song! There was a time when the territory of many villages was the countryside where the churchbell could be heard—like the old-fashioned definition of a Cockney: someone born within sound of Bowbells. Sensations such as these are never entirely forgotten; not that they are much thought about, but they remind us that we are where we belong—and equally important, I think: they are not shared with outsiders.

Is that what we mean by a sense of place? Is this total adjustment to and immersion in the inhabited landscape what we aspire to? I hope not, for at their most beautiful and rewarding, our European–American landscapes stand for a very different relationship. Explain it how we will—religious insight, psychological shift, growing awareness of the wider world outside the village, or whatever—there came a time some five centuries ago when we began to see the landscape from a new and more detached perspective. The villager in the old inhabited landscape was never an efficient farmer nor interested in changing his ways. He had not presumed to inquire into the hidden aspects of nature: the composition of the soil, the development of plants, the vagaries of the weather; all that he knew was what his senses told him. But then he discovered that he had a distinct, human role to play. "The farmer," says an ancient handbook of agriculture, "should study the nature of the land from which he expects to make a living, and diligently learn whether the soil is cold or warm, moist or dry, sandy or clayey. . . . For just as every man and every animal has his own peculiarities, every field has its own nature." He was further urged to treat the land as a teacher treats a child whom he wants to develop into a responsible individual, or think of himself as a midwife, helping bring something into the world. He was to see himself as a trainer who patiently encourages the best and most useful traits in a colt or a young dog. In short, he was no longer to be a drudge, blindly following