Introduction

An Empirical Visualisation

I

When considering the interplay between the recurrent ingredients that constitute the phenomenon of *an image*, it would be no exaggeration to claim that *space* and *landscape* are closely-related issues, if not two sides of the same coin. Space in a just loosely mimetic image could be defined as that which creates distance relationships between solid bodies; and insofar as these spatial relationships are not limited to the mutual positioning of the bodies, but also involve more or less stationary surroundings, the domain of the landscape begins to emerge. This visualisation can be achieved via various zones of cultural elaboration - interiors and cities, for example - and yet the landscape will always constitute a form of fundamental priming, by means of which the parameters of the pictorial space are made visible.

If the landscape of an image - which I will here concisely designate *the landscape image* - thus accounts for a zone in which the eye can wander outwards, possibly to end in distant and unprocessed nature, it is by no means a case of the landscape image denying the presence of the beholder. As with all forms of representation generated by humans, the landscape image is inscribed in a symbolic order and thus functions as a filter between human being and nature - a prism, which converts forms of nature into a matrix for the identity of a given culture.

In this study I will introduce a model of analysis for ways in which this prism can be interpreted in its development from the oldest-known images to modernity. That I venture to choose such a bird's-eye perspective - indeed, consider it far more apposite than more nearsighted positivist or relativist strategies - is due to the simple empirical fact that from this height a comparatively elegant and simple pattern becomes apparent. This pattern deals with the development of a quite specific parameter within the landscape image: the combined make-up of the spatial depth and the vantage point from which this depth can be observed. By making a comparison

between images from the various Western cultures that have existed throughout our historical time span, it will thus become apparent that, with cyclic interruptions, a steadily deeper and more elaborate landscape image has evolved, and also that this landscape image has been observed from increasingly well-defined vantage points.

If we look at some of the first extant images, Palaeolithic cave paintings, it is quite remarkable to see that the cave painters only depicted exclusively mobile subjects: chiefly animals, occasionally human figures, tools or fragments of these (PLATE 1). What could in general terms be described as the setting – static nature with its mountains, trees, rivers and skies – is absent. That this is not simply due to a particular preference on the part of the painter at the time, but is connected to a way of viewing, is evident from the spatial parameters of the picture: they hardly exist. If a figure happens to be placed in an area that is already occupied by another figure, the two will cross through one another as in a double exposure, rather than the one covering the other.

The case changes somewhat if we fast-forward to Ancient Egyptian images of the last three millennia BC. These images might well include landscape elements such as trees, rivers and mountains; and, unlike the Palaeolithic images, these elements are not only arranged in relation to one another via systematic covering effects, but also in relation to a surrounding frame, which for the first time gives an impression of a relationship between something *out in the world* and an observation point *from where* this something is viewed (FIG. 1). Nevertheless, landscape elements in Ancient Egyptian images will be limited to the immediate environment in which the human figures are active – whether the elements are trees, waterways or curving terrain. And corresponding to this, the vantage point is limited to a generalising *en face* or profile.

However, if finally these pictures are compared with a painting such as Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Mists* (*c.* 1818; PLATE 2), painted many thousands of years later, it can be seen that the depth of view now stretches towards a distant, misty horizon, while it is made clear that this distance is being viewed from a quite specific vantage point: a point directly behind the jutting rock in the immediate foreground, whence the wanderer is confronted with the unruly and intense forces of nature. The image now appears as a fragment, framing a view towards an endless and varied outside world; and the way in which this outside world presents itself within the frame of the image has become totally dependent on the vantage point of the beholder.

Fig. 1. *Sennefer and His Sister* (18th Dynasty, 1447-1420 BC), fresco. Thebes, tomb of Sennefer.

Fig. 2. *Human Figures, Animals and Trees with Windfall Fruit* (*c.* 10,000/6000-2000 BC), rock painting. Albarracín, Doña Clotilde.

Fig. 3. *Naram-Sin's Victory Stela* (*c.* 2270 BC), from Susa. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

Fig. 4. *Odyssey Landscape* (*c.* 40 BC), fresco from the Esquiline Hill. Rome, Vatican, Musei Vaticani.

Fig. 5. Jan van Goyen, *View of Leiden* (1647), oil on wood. Northampton (Mass.), Smith College Museum of Art.

This sequence of pictorial history, in which bodies are enveloped in increasingly varied settings seen from increasingly well-defined viewing positions, can be described with a photographic metaphor: *depth of field*. Depth of field is a measurement of the degree to which the surrounding environment of a specific motif can be admitted into a photographic image – the extent to which the diaphragm allows the lens to make a clear-cut image of the bodies in front of and behind the point of focus – and I will thus argue that the depth of field of the pictorial gaze increases over the course of history. With a few more markers: after the Palaeolithic ultra-shallow depth of field, in which only mobile bodies are specified, clusters of correlated, but still unframed figures and landscape elements (Mesolithic and Neolithic; FIG. 2) follow; then framed figures and landscape elements in the immediate environment (Egypt); then figures seen against a background of land formations (Mesopotamia; FIG. 3); then again figures depicted with foreshortening effects, placed in front of middle-distance horizons (Rome; FIG. 4); and finally, perspectival and infinitely expansive space, possibly with no figures at all (modernity; FIG. 5).

II

Which interpretative implications could be ascribed to this process? Under the impression that we really are dealing with a progression – a particular set of parameters which develop and push onward through the ages – the process could reasonably be called *evolutionary*. After postmodernism's and deconstruction's subjugation of the grand narratives, indeed simply after positivism's long-since sown scepticism of historical structures, this is a term that might well grate on many an ear; and yet I am convinced that it is the only option if we want to interpret the phenomenon.

If one element of cultural development displays a conspicuously regular pattern, it would seem tempting to assume that it is not on its own but should rather be seen as a symptom of regularities which also concern other parts of the culture. Firstly, this kind of correlation is seen in certain forms of evolutionistic thought in which cultural development comprises an organism-like whole built up from coordinated sub-domains. According to the anthropological and sociological branches of this thinking, societies have a tendency to go through certain universal stages which set limits for how heterogeneous a culture can be, indeed which presuppose structural correspondences between cultural domains if a society in its totality is to be functional. If we are to believe the more cognition-oriented advocates of this theory, such as Talcott Parsons or Jürgen Habermas, this means that each evolutionary stage has, if not its own worldview then at least its own limited field of worldviews, and that each individual's perception of nature and self is inscribed in a particular area of this field.

As to the correspondences, the structural similarities which can be observed across cultural domains, they are best formalised with pieces of theory taken from an originally non-evolutionary tradition: structuralism and its context-oriented derivatives. One of these pieces, the concept of *field* taken from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, denotes the structure of forces – rules, practices, traditions – which influence each culturally-determined action. This space of possibles varies depending on cultural domain, and yet it is no more specific than that certain structural similarities can be observed between different *fields*. Overall, I will therefore consider each evolutionary stage to be characterised by an overarching *field*, which – with acknowledgement to Foucault – I will call an *epistemic field*. As regards the visible structures of the sub-*field*, e.g. the set of rules for landscape spaces in a given era, I employ the science historian Thomas Kuhn's term *paradigm*.

Equipped with these hastily sketched tools (more about them in the next chapter), we may deduce that the evolution of landscape paradigms can be read as a record of a more general evolution: the evolution undergone by culture's epistemic *fields* from the Palaeolithic period to modernity. The three structurally related cultural domains to which I have chiefly linked the landscape image could be described

metaphorically by a terrain – a landscape space – covering the expanse from the very near to the far distant: i.e. [1] the pole of vantage point: *self-consciousness*, [2] the middle distance: the *socially-determined perception of nature* and [3] the pole of remoteness: the *world picture of cosmology*. Should these three domains – self-consciousness, societal perception of nature and world picture – seem to be rather at odds with one another, I will endeavour to show that actually, as the general theories of evolution and *field* prescribe, they correspond closely and are mutually determined.

If we start with the innermost pole – that of self-consciousness – its connection with the pictorial space could be indicated by the consistent way in which the pictorial view towards the distance depends on specification of the location whence the scene is observed. It is only in relation to the location from which *I* look at the world that these lines appear to be sloping and this mountain seems to fade into the horizon, in brief: a sense of depth is generated. Thus the increase in depth of field could just as well be described as a heightened specification of the individual vantage point and, in extension of this, in terms of a history of mentalities, of heightened self-consciousness: in the very act of an 'I' looking at the world, distant objects are arranged relative to nearer objects; and as the degree of self-consciousness develops, the depth of field of the pictorial view, from the focused motif towards the distance, increases.

Were we similarly to provide an equivalent introductory impression of the way in which pictorial landscape space is connected to the middle-distance – the socially-determined perception of nature – we could start by commenting on the kind of society that produced Palaeolithic space- and landscape-less cave paintings, and then on the kind of societies that proceeded to wrap figures in a surrounding environment. The cave paintings were produced by hunter-gatherers who lived a nomadic existence and were therefore unaware of the difference between a man-made space and a surrounding wilderness, between culture and nature. When, however, we look at the first images to include figures in relation to one another and to their environment, in the form of trees, water, hoof-prints, etc., i.e. Meso- and Neolithic rock paintings (FIGS. 2 and 1.3), we note that these images were made by the first people to have enclosed themselves in an artificial urban space and from this remove to have looked at what was now surrounding nature.

In other words, interest in and the ability to give the environment pictorial form first arose when humans became isolated from nature in the artificial – urban – enclosure. They had, so to speak, to take a step backwards in order to see the surrounding environment – which then in turn, and along with a more advanced civilisation and thereby heightened isolation of the urban enclaves, became an object of yearning: a yearning for a lost paradisiacal unity. On becoming, in short, alienated from nature, the need arose to recreate it in the illusionistic form called

landscape – a word that first crystallised when the process reached maturity in the 1400s. And the development is not limited to the frame of the image, but applies just as well to nature, which is thus elevated to an image, becomes *picturesque*.

But if the depth of field of the landscape image is extended in step with the subjective individual's withdrawal into the shell of self-consciousness, and with the social individual's isolation in the urban enclosure, it also expands in step with a third separation: the one that occurs in the pole of distance – the cosmological world picture – between spirit and matter. The world picture is wedded to humankind via an underlying concept of nature as a body. As established by first Hegel and then Jungian-influenced history of religion, the birth of self-consciousness would seem to involve a new phenomenon, spirit, increasingly detaching itself from surrounding nature – be this interpreted as the body of the self or of the world. On a cosmological scale, this split means that the heavens, the seat of the spirit, detaches from the earth – an earth which, through the severance, becomes feminine. Whereas, to the Palaeolithic mind, woman and her element, earth, were the source of life, the philosopher of antiquity found this source in the male spirit and its extension upwards, the perfect and divine heavens; the indestructible male spirit here became the capacity that confers form on female – and now passive and demonised – matter.

To bring in the evolution of the pictorial gaze again, this gradual split of spirit and matter, heavens and earth, would seem to be synchronised with the gradually increasing depth of field. While the Palaeolithic feminine cosmos involves a non-existent depth of field, the world picture that is dualised in material earth and spiritual heavens is inscribed in a culture which is pictorially conditioned by the capacity of being able to look *out* into a landscape for the first time: of figures being seen against the background of land formations (Late Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome). In the Greco-Roman culture this pictorial gaze is further extended to quasi-perspectival foreshortenings, as around 500 BC there is a movement away from a cosmos based in a flat earth (the *dualistic world picture*) to one that places a spherical earth at the centre of a series of heavenly orbs (the *geocentric world picture;* **FIG. 6**).

This geocentric system, however, breaks up during the Middle Ages when first the heavens and later the whole world is declared to be infinite. According to a number of 14th-16th-century philosophers – Nicole Oresme, Nicholas of Cusa, Nikolaus Copernicus – the earth is neither the centre of the world nor is it stationary. It could now be described as a negligible globe circling the sun along with the other planets. As Descartes, Newton and Laplace later established, the prerequisite for this *heliocentric* system is a universe that has expanded to infinite dimensions (**FIG. 7**).

Interestingly, the perspectival pictorial space breaks through at about the same time as the emergence of this heliocentric system. Directing the gaze towards the

Fig. 6. Bartolo di Fredi, *Creation of the World* (1367), fresco. San Gimignano, Chiesa della Collegiata.

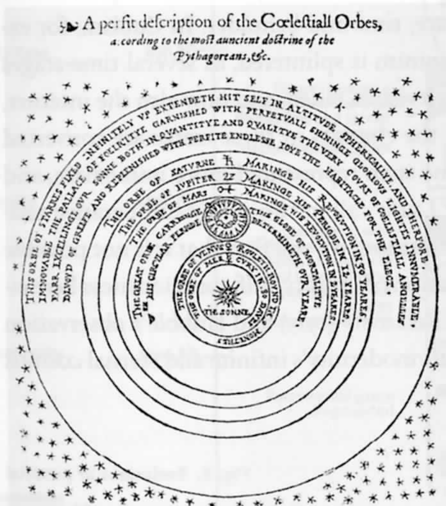


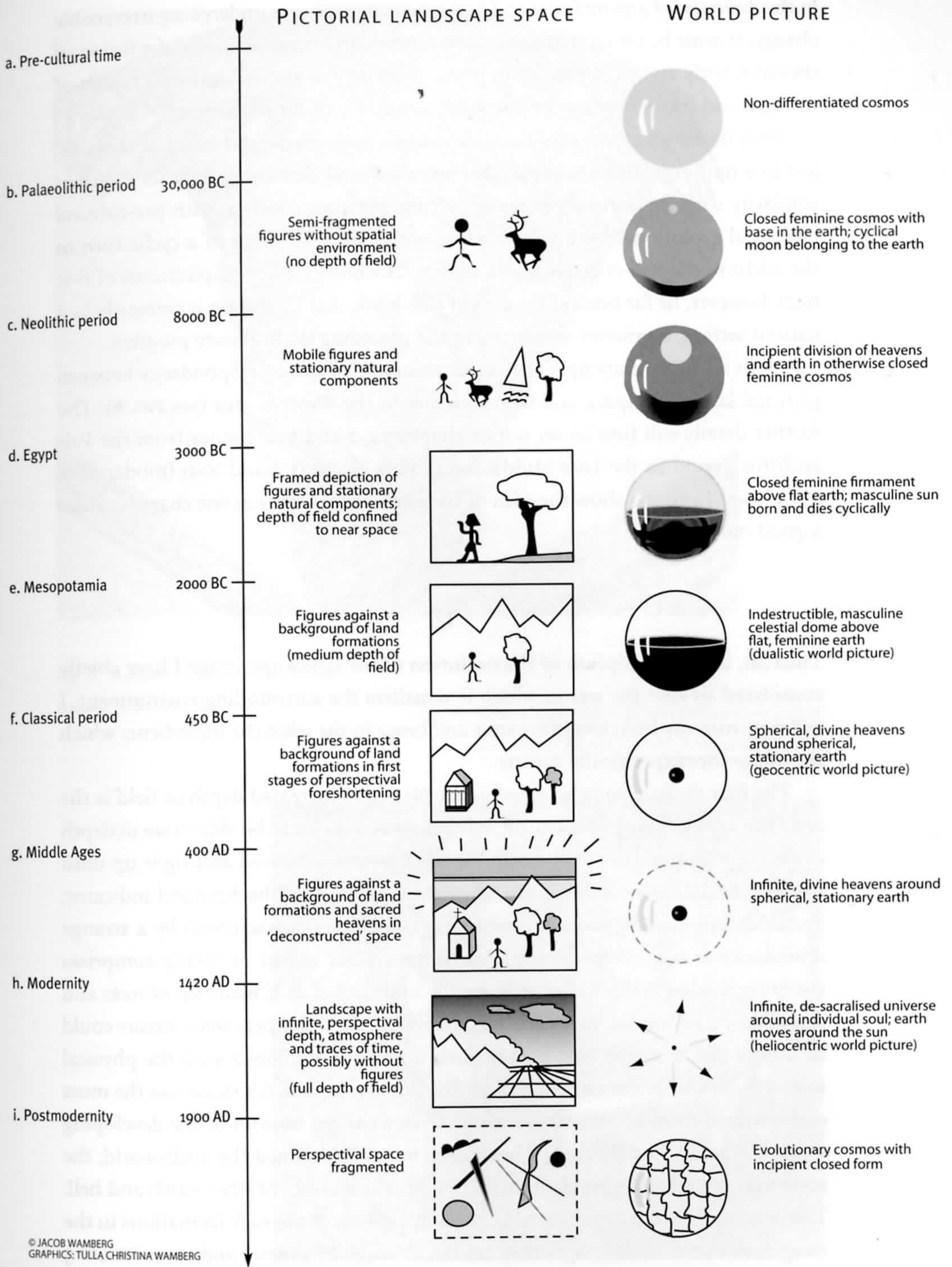
Fig. 7. Copernicus' infinite universe as visualised by Thomas Digges (1576).

infinitely distant horizon of a landscape image is therefore not just a question of a *way* of looking at the world; it is equally qualified by a notion of how that world is *organised* – in other words: of the world picture. And this organisation relates to both the internal and external frame, because the universe expands synchronously with the spirit being ultimately drained out of nature, in Hegelian fashion, in order to be concentrated in the independent individual of modernity – that individual in whose eye the perspectival visual rays are gathered.

Even though the evolution of pictorial space, as outlined here, is only definitively carried through in Western modernity, there would seem to be larger or smaller run-ups to it all over the world. China, in particular, goes a good way in the process; the Far East during the Middle Ages, with early autonomous images of distant mist-enveloped mountains, would seem to be even ahead of the West in this and other respects. However, in the current project I cannot undertake the consistent comparison between cultures which the model warrants. The reader must forgive me for this Eurocentric approach, even though it can be partially justified by the decisive maturation of this process in the West.

If Western modernity thus represents a stage during which a particular set of cultural parameters are completed, it is nevertheless vital to emphasise that this in no way implies the end of cultural evolution, let alone its ultimate fulfilment. After the year 1900 a cultural evolutionary phase occurs – let us call it postmodernity – which, on a global level, breaks up and restructures what culture, especially its Western element, had hitherto developed. In all the cultural evolutionary parameters we have so far looked at, a new development can thus be observed breaking with the currents of the preceding millennia. Rather than instant-freezing perspective characterised by its gaze into infinity, the image is now characterised by a more complex and at the same time dense coordination of space, time and beholder. In Cubism, for example, the undifferentiated spatial continuum is splintered, as several time-stages are involved in the same image; in film, television, video, and now also the internet, indexical traces of the environment and the changes in these traces are converted into moving images, which make the time span represented more immediate, and which also reorganise and de-locate it. If I now call in two of my comparative analytical areas, world picture and self-consciousness, we will find that it is not possible to maintain modernity's absolute polarisation of infinity/self-consciousness here either. While Einstein's General Theory of Relativity (1915) and Hubble's observation of the expansion of the universe (1926) shift modernity's infinite and eternal cosmos

Fig. 8. Evolutions of pictorial landscape space and world picture.


PICTORIAL LANDSCAPE SPACE
WORLD PICTURE
a. Pre-cultural time
Non-differentiated cosmos
b. Palaeolithic period
30,000 BC
Semi-fragmented figures without spatial environment (no depth of field)
Closed feminine cosmos with base in the earth; cyclical moon belonging to the earth
c. Neolithic period
8000 BC
Mobile figures and stationary natural components
Incipient division of heavens and earth in otherwise closed feminine cosmos
d. Egypt
3000 BC
Framed depiction of figures and stationary natural components; depth of field confined to near space
Closed feminine firmament above flat earth; masculine sun born and dies cyclically
e. Mesopotamia
2000 BC
Figures against a background of land formations (medium depth of field)
Indestructible, masculine celestial dome above flat, feminine earth (dualistic world picture)
f. Classical period
450 BC
Figures against a background of land formations in first stages of perspectival foreshortening
Spherical, divine heavens around spherical, stationary earth (geocentric world picture)
g. Middle Ages
400 AD
Figures against a background of land formations and sacred heavens in 'deconstructed' space
Infinite, divine heavens around spherical, stationary earth
h. Modernity
1420 AD
Landscape with infinite, perspectival depth, atmosphere and traces of time, possibly without figures (full depth of field)
Infinite, de-sacralised universe around individual soul; earth moves around the sun (heliocentric world picture)
i. Postmodernity
1900 AD
Perspectival space fragmented
Evolutionary cosmos with incipient closed form
© JACOB WAMBERG
GRAPHICS: TULLA CHRISTINA WAMBERG

in the direction of a more finite and heterogeneous universe undergoing irreversible change, it must be noted that many 20th-century philosophies – from the fusion of thought, body and world found in phenomenology to deconstruction's fusion of thought and text – displace the Cartesian autonomy of consciousness.

With its deconstruction of the independent subject and placement of this subject in a no-longer infinite world, this latest cultural development bears a certain similarity with the earliest phases of cultural evolution, indeed with pre-cultural biological evolution, and I will therefore not hesitate to speak of a cyclic turn in the midst of the still-effective irreversibility. The more explicit implications of this turn, however, lie far beyond the aim of this book, and I mention it primarily as a natural setting, a *terminus ante quem* for the preceding evolutionary progress.

All in all, I can draw up a schematic summary of the correspondence between pictorial landscape space and world picture in the Western area (see **FIG. 8**). The further details will first be set out in chapters 1, 2 and 3 (sequence from the Palaeolithic period to the Late Middle Ages), plus chapters 8 and 10-11 (modernity), but I have chosen to show the sum of the parts at this stage as the chart provides a good outline.

III

Thus far, in my description of the evolution of the landscape image I have chiefly considered its *how*: the way in which it visualises the surrounding environment. I will now turn my lens towards matter and bring in the *what*: the ingredients which the image more specifically depicts.

The first domain to be revealed in the Neolithic increased depth of field is the zone from which consciousness must break away in order to be able to see in depth at all: the womb of the earth. From the Mesopotamian period and right up until the Late Middle Ages, when earth formations act as fixed background indicator, the landscape paradigms in Western images are thus characterised by a strange dominance of *stone*. If the pictorial earth base is not absent or merely comprises the bottom edge of the frame, it is usually undulating, as if made up of *rocks* and *mountains*. As we will see, particularly in chapters 2 and 5, this persistent texture could be interpreted as a sign that life on earth unfolds in symbiosis with the physical matter from which it is created and to which it is returned, for stone was the most concentrated form of *terra*, the heaviest element at the bottom of the developing world hierarchy. The exposed, chaotic rock masses contained the underworld, the zone that united, in ambivalent fashion, womb and tomb, Mother Earth and hell. This reading can be substantiated by close inspection of the rock formations in the images, as in the Middle Ages they are cut through by ravines and caves (**PLATE 3**

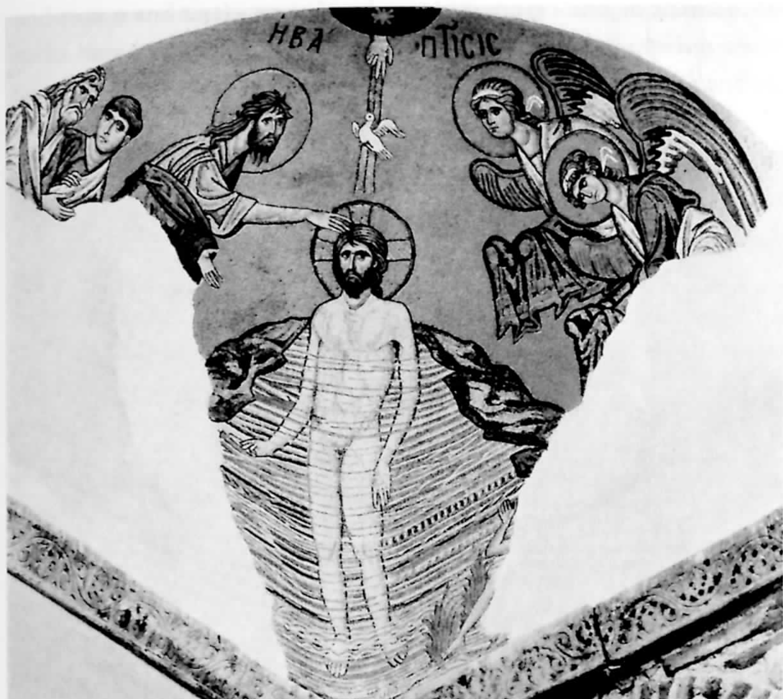


Fig. 9. *Baptism of Christ* (*c.* 1100), mosaic.
Daphni, Monastery Church.

Fig. 10. *Scene from the Legend of Saint Philip and the Eunuch* (*c.* 1327), fresco. Serbia, Dečani, Monastery Church.

Fig. 11. Limbourg brothers, *Hell* (*c.* 1413-16), miniature from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. Chantilly, Musée Condé, f. 108.

and FIGS. 9 and 2.42) – typical underworld features – and, in addition, many of the rocks have in themselves similarities to cave formations, which is testimony to a belief in the earth as a living being, *natura naturans* (e.g. PLATE 4 and FIGS. 10, 2.9 and 2.90).

However, the vertical gaze, which links the rocks to the depths of the earth, continuously merges into a horizontal view, which perceives them as the area beyond civilisation. Rather than representing a realm outside time and space, the underworld is the rock-filled wilderness encountered just outside the urban wall. Based on the ambivalence so characteristic of dualism, this wilderness is in turn not to be understood as merely a domain in which cultural control is displaced by chaos, but equally as one in which urban decadence is rejuvenated by a primordial state. The cave leading to the depths of hell can, instantly, become identical with the cave from which the Fountain of Life flows (FIGS. 11 and 5.11A).

The dominance of rocks in pre-modern, post-Egyptian landscape paradigms impedes the presence of what could be called *the green landscape*. Even though the rocks in no way preclude plants, these never take root in open meadows, gently curving hills or forests with panoramic spatial views (FIGS. 12 and 2.4). Wide plains with loose soil are nowhere to be seen. Plants displacing rocks can only occur by means of agoraphobically dense thickets, such as that seen in the Roman garden fresco from Livia's House (*c.* 20 BC; PLATE 5). It is as if plants, turf and trees belong to a paradisiacal substance that cannot break free from its origin in the life-giving underworld. With a patriarchal culture gradually cleaving paradise from earth in order to represent the celestial reality, the only way of dominating the pictorial gaze with plants is thus by means of thickets, under which the ground is completely supplanted.

If rocks constitute the first remoteness reached by the depth of field in the Western pictorial view, *the heavens*, as we will see in chapter 3, constitute the second. Depiction of the heavens as background – in contrast to focusing on single heavenly bodies – is a phenomenon which enters the history of art at an amazingly late stage. Probably the earliest Western examples of expanses that can with certainty be regarded as celestial backgrounds are to be found in Greco-Roman frescoes, and here in utmost moderation. The sun is not shown, and the closest we get to atmospheric effects is an intuitive aerial perspective (FIG. 6.10), occasional light towards the horizon and wreaths of clouds that can only be elicited by revelation of deities (FIG. 13). A factor pushing the heavens further to the fore in the image is that of the medieval cult of the celestial: if the heavens are not streaked like the heavenly spheres that transmit divine spirit to matter (FIG. 14), they are covered with precious colours such as gold and lapis lazuli blue, symbols of the divine light (FIGS. 15 and 3.10). All in all, the geocentric world picture here acts as a magnetic field, which polarises the pictorial space

Fig. 12. Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Agony in the Garden*, tempera on wood, from the large *Maestà* (1308-11) in Siena Cathedral. Siena, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.

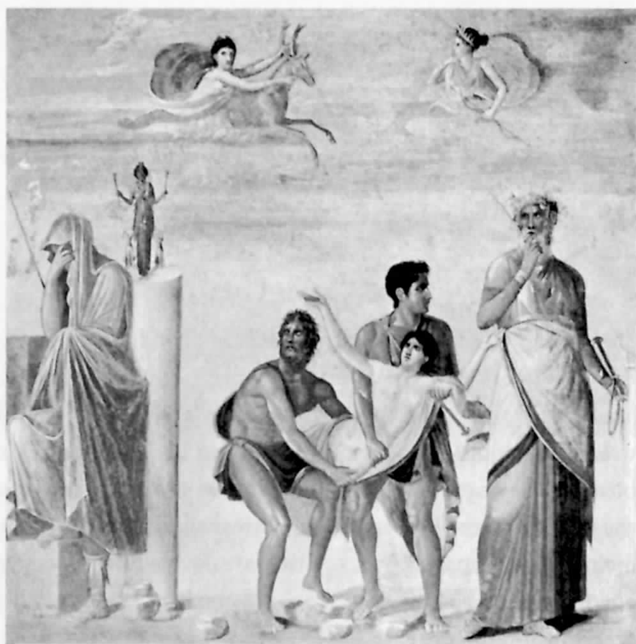


Fig. 13. *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* (*c.* 0-79 AD), fresco from Pompeii, Casa del Poeta Tragico. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

Fig. 14. *Nativity* (1002-14), miniature from the *Pericope Book of Heinrich II*, executed in Reichenau. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, ms Clm. 4452, f. 8v.

Fig. 15. *Second Coming* (9th century), apse mosaic. Rome, Santa Prassede.

in spiritual heavens and material underworld in the same way that Saint Augustine characterised the newly-created world: "The one is endowed with form from the very first, the other is utterly formless; the one, 'heaven', being the 'heaven of heaven', the other, 'earth', being 'the earth invisible and unorganized'."[2]

But the barrier impeding the pre-modern pictorial gaze in achieving atmospheric skies is not only of a spatial, but also a *temporal* character. Time controls division into day and night, it controls the passing of months and seasons, and it controls weather phenomena. It is not for nothing that the Italian *tempo* and the French *temps* mean both time and weather. With the exception of some depictions of seasonal work in Egyptian art, phenomena of time – nocturnal darkness, sunsets, seasons, clouds, rain, snow, patination, ruins, germination, withering – are generally conspicuous through their absence in pre-modern landscape paradigms.

Conversely, they become, as we will see in chapter II, increasingly indispensable phenomena in the landscape paradigm which breaks through with remarkable suddenness in European painting around 1420, and which – with the exception of a moderation during the Renaissance, the neo-antique *field* – stays intact right up until the year 1900. As the gaze can now take in the three dimensions of space in geometrical perspective, it can also freeze the fourth dimension: temporal variability. This could be described as an approximation of what the Germans call *Augenblick* – the *Augenblickliche* being understood as that which both ties sight to a specific viewing point and to a transient point in time.

In this time-filled pictorial space the pre-modern rocks and mountains have to be shifted to the remote distance, and they are joined by pebbles, gentle hills, forests and wide-open plains. The point of view glides, as it were, from the mountains, with their hard edges and blocked views, to the level plains, which can be eroded, ploughed and surveyed in perspectival grids. As the magnetic field between paradise and underworld is offset by the earth's mobility in the Copernican void, the underworld is invaded by the exiled paradise: the rocks are eroded and covered by turf. We can almost hear the rushing sound as the dualistic vacuum is breached and the new, wide-open pictorial space fills with atmosphere and time.

IV

So far I have approached the landscape image chiefly via the two outer poles: the cosmological world picture and self-consciousness. By so doing I have pinned down some of its spatial, visual and temporal aspects as well as some of the domains – rocks, turf, heavens – through which these aspects are communicated. If, however, we tackle the third and intermediate zone in my comparative interpretative terrain – the socially-determined perception of nature – we are led in towards the

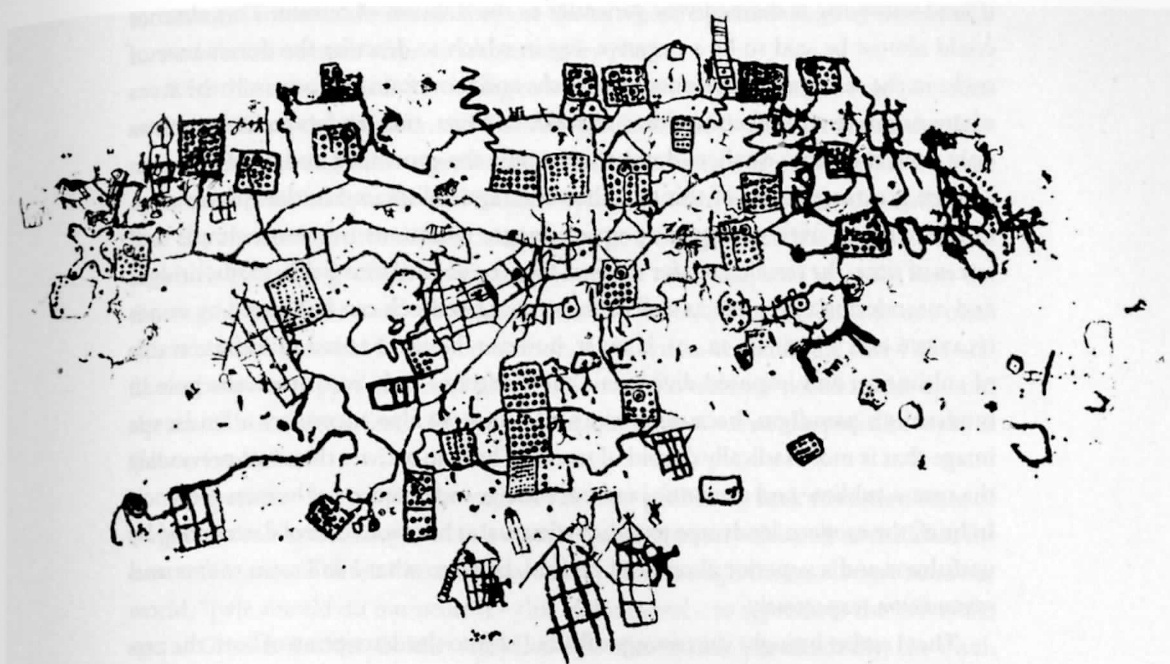


Fig. 16. 'Pictogram' of Bedolina in Valcamonica (1st millennium BC), rock engraving. Valcamonica.

middle distance where natural wilderness interferes with urban-based culture. Here, on the plane of the earth formations, the ground is potentially subject to cultural plane-bound networks of plough furrows, boundary lines, canals and roads – in short: to traces of cultivation.

These traces and their causal activity are to be found now and then in the Neolithic period and early metal culture, and also in what I will regard as their last offshoot: Egypt (FIGS. 16 and 4.1-4.8). If, however, we look at the common post-Egyptian landscape-ground right up until the 15th century – and by "common" I mean a landscape-ground which is not prompted by specific themes, but is determined by the paradigm – it is remarkable that it has largely been stripped of all traces of use. In other words, we encounter no roads, fences, hedges, ditches, bridges, mines or – particularly eye-catching – cornfields, which would seem to have been taboo in Mesopotamia, in the Minoan culture, in Greek and Roman antiquity, and which in the Middle Ages can only be prised out if required by a particular subject – Cain at the plough, for example. We could look upon this as an *absence of land surveying*,

if land surveying is defined very generally as the division of terrain. This absence could almost be said to be a negative way in which to describe the dominance of rocks in the same landscape images, as rocks and mountains are precisely the areas where urban territorial control has to yield. In short, this landscape image shows only *terra*, the virgin earth, and not the *territory*, the controlled and divided earth.

The protracted state of things is, however, again displaced in the 15th century. Corresponding with the opening up of images to distant horizons, clouds and traces of time, the terrain can, for the first time, be divided into fields, roads, bridges and meandering rivers just as well as the exposed bedrock can be scarred by mines (PLATES 6 and 7 and FIG. 12.49). It must, however, be emphasised that these traces of cultivation and imposed divisions – the territory – only constitute one pole in modernity's paradigm, because at the same time we also encounter a landscape image that is more radically devoid of traces of human activity than was previously the case: a sublime and romantic landscape image independent of human presence. In brief, the modern landscape paradigm fluctuates between control determined by usefulness and a superior absence of control, between what I will term *realism* and *romanticism* respectively.

That I earlier brought the concept of paradise into the description of both the pre-modern landscape image and its termination is more than metaphor. The change in landscape image paradigm around 1420 is suspiciously reminiscent of the mythical upheaval of *the Fall*. The paradise myth and its Greco-Roman variant, *the Golden Age myth*, are prevalent in the same cultures that cultivate the dualistic, gradually geocentric world picture – the Mesopotamian, the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian cultures – and, as I shall point out in chapters 4-6, the structure of the myth must be considered fundamental for an epistemic *field* that, cutting across other *fields*, controls these cultures. This *field* will therefore be designated *the Golden Age field*, whilst its allied paradigm in visual art will be designated *the Golden Age paradigm*.

The Golden Age myth deals with humankind's movement from an ideal state in harmony with nature to a fallen state. Before the Fall there is *eternal spring*, and nature is so fertile that humankind has *no need to work*, but has the produce of nature within *immediate reach*. Variants of the myth in which paradise still exists in the present, locate it beyond the wilderness, usually in *the mountains*. After the Fall, however, eternal spring vanishes and humankind is forced into agriculture, tree felling, trade and mining; activities which imply that products are now procured from distant places. In brief, the myth paraphrases a progress from timelessness to time, from non-work to work, from closedness to openness and from the mountains to a varied terrain rooted in the plains. This progression corresponds strikingly to the change in landscape image paradigm around 1420: before then landscape images were characterised by timelessness, lack of traces of work, closed form and

mountains, whereas afterwards they are characterised by time, traces of work, infinity and varied terrains often characterised by plains.

Why this coincidence? According to evolutionary-minded anthropologists such as Leslie White, the paradise and Golden Age myths deal with the actual development from roaming hunter-gatherers to settled farmers and metalworkers. At the same time, from Marx to Edward Burnett Tylor and on to Habermas, it is made clear that the ancient cultures in their later phases go through a process of urbanisation in which power is gradually concentrated in the city-state, concurrently with the down-grading of the rural population to a low caste, if not slaves. It is not until this advanced juncture in social evolution – a juncture at which the elite class vacillates between suppression and glorification of the violence necessary to uphold the social hierarchy (Marx's Asiatic and antique stages) – that the paradise myth is fully crystallised.

The paradise myth points away from current problems, back towards a state of origin and self-sufficiency, and this state is simultaneously elevated to the ideal for contemporaneous elites. Plato maintains that even though God no longer rules the world, "[w]e should do our utmost – this is the moral – to reproduce the life of the age of Cronus [i.e. the Golden Age] [...]."[3] By this means, paradoxically, the myth helps to cement the hierarchical social structure as, by making nature's original but now lost fertility an imperative of an energy-demanding social structure, it becomes necessary to maintain a slave class which, through hard work, can re-create the lost Golden Age energy for a privileged upper class.

In other words, a key stage in alienation from nature had hereby been reached, the penultimate stage before modernity. This alienation led to a longing *outwards* towards untamed nature around urban settlements, at the same time as there was a longing *backwards* to an original natural state. My contention will be that the spatial and the temporal longing are two aspects of the same issue, the object of which is paradise nature. Moreover, I will contend that this longing can also be registered visually, as for the first time it becomes possible to depict figures *against a background of* land formations. The urban longing outwards and backwards towards paradise thus allows for a spatial perception of the landscape image. However, as the hierarchical structure freezes the movement away from paradise – by suppressing consciousness of post-paradisiacal phenomena such as agriculture, access to mountain interiors and geographical expansion – this social structure also hinders the pictorial space from being marked by traces of work and swelling to infinite dimensions. The resulting pictorial space – the classical – is thus fixed in a golden intersection midway between openness and closedness, the longing to travel outwards and the fear of expansion.

The regression towards paradise relates in a surprisingly concrete sense to the

tangible terrain: in the centre we encounter the city, the climax of civilisation; then there is the cultivated plain with its tracks, fences, hedges and cornfields, the emblem of the Fall; and finally we reach the wilderness, in which to indulge in primitive activities such as hunting, pastoralism, fishing and fruit-picking. As these activities do not depend on the cultivation of nature, but are based on available produce, they can be called paradisiacal. The most resistant wilderness is the mountain, on the slopes of which the cultivation of grain has to stop. Fruit trees, however, cope very well with the undulations, and especially pastoralism thrives, as the mountains abound with trees and pastures. The mountains are the zone in which civilisation has to give way in favour of more original life forms. Mountains shield the underworld – chaos – that crushes civilisation, but on the other hand they hold promise of paradise, the garden beyond the wilderness. Here we meet the primordial *terra*, in contrast to the *territory* of the cultivated plains.

My point is, in other words, that the stretch from the mountain to the cultivated plain (see FIG. 17) would seem, in a remarkable manner, to be formative for the evolutionary process of culture – so much so that one dares to compare it with general systems theory's concept of *attractor*: the terrain of forces which structure a dynamic process (see Interlude). The attractor terrain of the landscape contains the contours of a *field* – or rather: a sequence of two epistemic *fields*. A ball rolling through this terrain undergoes the development from paradise to civilisation, from *terra* to *territory*, from primeval times to modernity – although attempts are made in antiquity to freeze this movement. Here the urban viewer has, so to speak, taken a seat at the edge of the cornfields and the view towards nature thus only takes in the gaze towards the mountains – these being the barrier which, via the underworld, gives access to the paradisiacal past that the city-state seeks to recreate. The cultivated plain, *territory*, which provides the view to infinity, constitutes the blind spot in antiquity's pictorial gaze.

The Golden Age paradigm not only keeps land surveying out of pre-modern rocky ground, but controls any activity taking place in the pictorial nature. Thus I also demonstrate in chapters 4-6 that grain culture is surprisingly absent in classical art, whereas pastoralism and wine culture are welcome subject areas (FIG. 18). Such ostensibly simple activities bear witness to an effortless self-sufficiency, which is ideal for classical thought since it is analogous to the closed form in the geocentric world picture and thereby also to the closedness of pictorial vision. In Plato's reference to the degenerate, trade-based culture in *The Republic*, it is not for nothing that images are included among the objects said to fulfil the many new surplus needs. In addition to images being weak copies of something that in itself is already copies of a higher reality – that of celestial ideas – they look at what is copied from a *distance* and from an *individual* point of view, which distorts the truth.

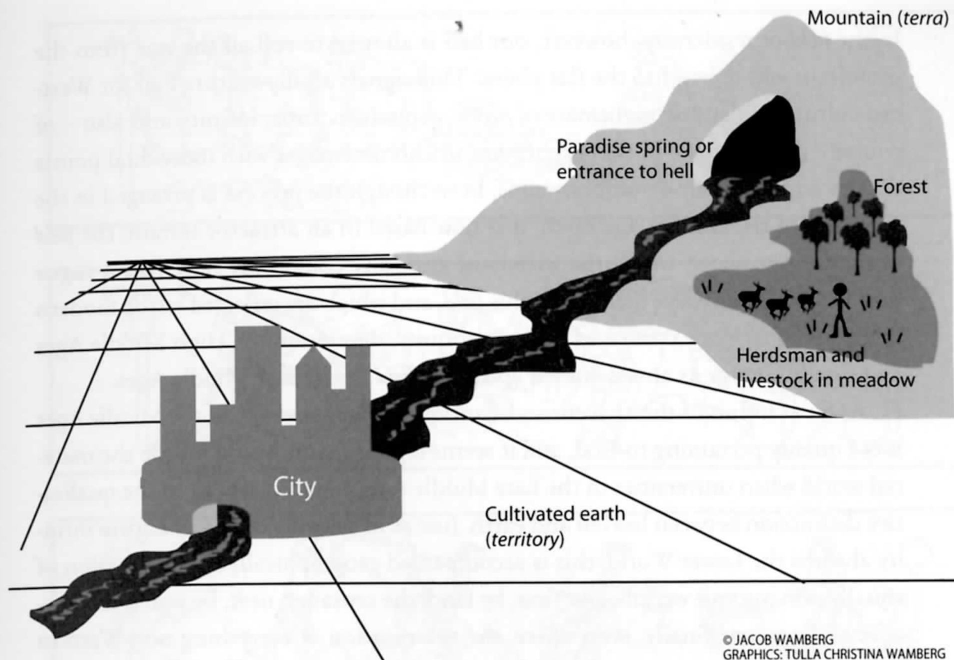


Fig. 17. The attractor terrain of Western cultural evolution.

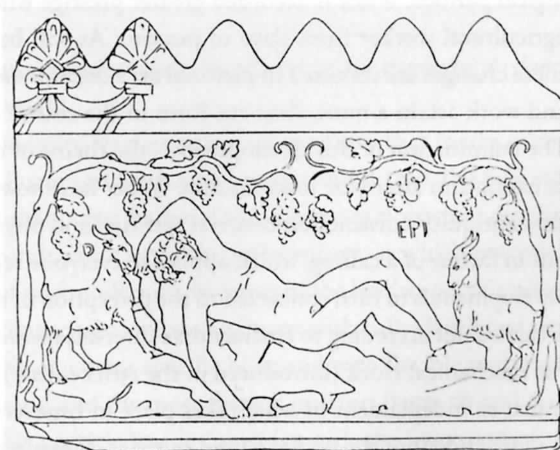


Fig. 18. *Sleeping Dionysus* (2nd century AD), Roman relief. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

V

In the *field* of modernity, however, our ball is allowed to roll all the way from the mountain and down into the flat plains. This signals a fully-mature Fall for Western culture, a Platonic nightmare of work, capitalism, time, infinity and also – of course – the reflection of that nightmare: illusionist images with individual points of view and infinitely distant horizons. Even though the process is presaged in the structure of the Golden Age myth, it is now based in an attractor terrain, the *field* of modernity, about which the writers of antiquity could only have had a vague notion. The parameters that define this *field*, and which are reflected in the modern landscape image, are conceived in late antiquity, develop in the High Middle Ages and finally emerge as an assembled epistemic *field* in the Late Middle Ages.

As far as infinity – the arch enemy of antiquity – is concerned, in the Middle Ages it is a quality pertaining to God, and it seems logical that it would invade the material world when universities in the Late Middle Ages sowed doubt as to the qualitative distinction between heaven and earth. Just as in the philosophy of nature infinity absorbs the Lower World, this is accompanied geographically by a succession of equally non-antique expansions: first, by land, the crusades; next, by water, the voyages of discovery; finally, everywhere, the colonisation of everything non-Western (cf. chapter 8). The voyages of discovery even interact with a new science of cartography, which appraises the terrain through the same type of grid that, in the newly-developed perspective of the image, is inserted between subject and world (FIG. 8.9). The actual physical expedition to distant shores is thereby inseparable from the virtual journey the gaze performs to the misty horizons of the landscape.

Also, the traces of time and work found in the landscape image must be linked to the epistemic *field*. Time becomes a more universally fundamental quantity, as history achieves direction in Christianity and monastic life is divided into chronological periods. Work is accorded greater prestige when feudalism transforms the agricultural worker from slave to peasant. As will be demonstrated in chapter 7, these changes are reflected in pictorial art's *calendar illustrations*, in which both time and work attain a more clear-cut form in the course of the Middle Ages (FIG. 19). The culmination of this development – the theme of chapter 10 – is the emergence of capitalism after year 1000. As Max Weber has shown, capitalist economy means that antiquity's distinction between spiritual and physical activity has to be evened out in favour of a calling, which applies to everyone regardless of status: work. This development is in turn connected to the perception of time, as capitalist wage labour is carried out according to abstract time intervals measured out by a new instrument, the mechanical clock (introduced in the 13th century). Modern time-measurement is just as independent of what takes place in time as modern space-measurement is independent of the bodies found in space. Measurement refers to systems which

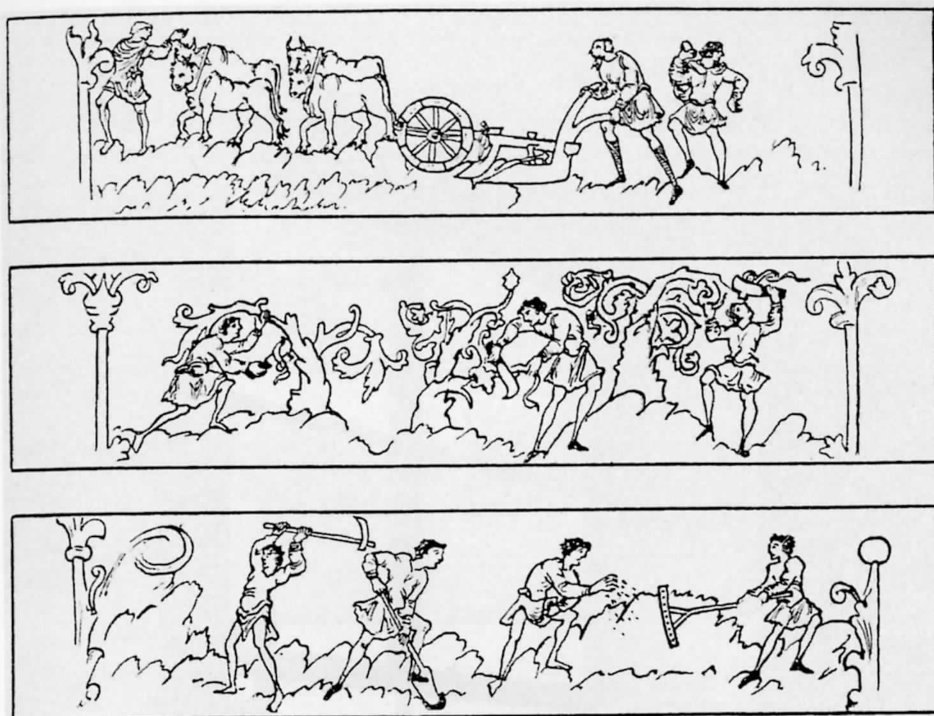


Fig. 19. *January, February and March* (11th century), Winchester miniature after no longer extant 9th-century manuscript from Rheims. London, British Library, ms Cotton Jul. A. VI.

are nominally defined by consciousness alone, thus bearing out modernity's divide between consciousness and world.

Although the *field* of modernity reaches a stage of maturity that marks out an assembled paradigm in the European landscape image around 1420, the *field* is by no means fully-developed at that point. Rather it is undergoing a constant development and cannot be said to culminate until the 19th century, at which point it is overlaid by a new *field*, that of postmodernity. In terms of the landscape, this means that it is not until the 19th century that we see an image with fully-developed time and space, an image occurring at a quite specific hour and with flexible movement between the nearest foreground and the most distant horizon (FIGS. 20 and 8.15). It is not for nothing that this realistic image coincides with the invention of the

Fig. 20. Caspar David Friedrich, *View from the Artist's Studio, Left Window* (1805-06), sepia on paper. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

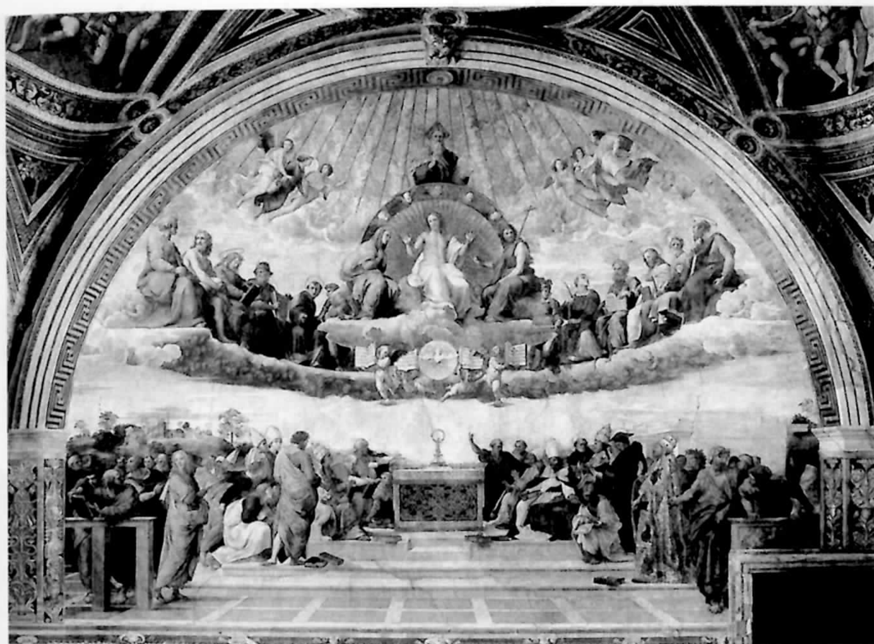


Fig. 21. Raphael, *Disputà* (1510-11), fresco. Rome, Vatican, Stanza della Segnatura.

Fig. 22. Esaias van de Velde, *Winter Scene* (1614), oil on canvas. Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art.

photograph, as the photograph constitutes the culmination – and the nascent dismantling – of the modern way of looking. Ingredients of the epistemic *field* that make this way of looking possible include Western monitoring of almost the entire surface of the earth and time-measurement common to the whole planet.

In order to pin down the cultural context for the new landscape paradigm it is necessary, as will be shown in chapter 9, to modify the term that usually provides its backdrop: *the Renaissance.* Renaissance means rebirth – the rebirth of antiquity – but does that really define modernity? Antiquity can well be regarded as an advanced step in the development towards the independent individual in an infinite environment, but when modernity completes this process it is, as Oswald Spengler in particular has shown, by means of quite other parameters than those of antiquity. A renaissance that literally attempts to re-create the cultural values of antiquity will therefore collide with the modern *field*.

In accordance with the concept of closedness, neo-antique art focuses on the ideal human body in narrative or allegorical situations. If dignity is to be preserved, the landscape image's newly-won scope has to be kept within certain limits, just as its earth formations must be timeless and uncultivated (FIG. 21). The modern landscape image with its infinite space, traces of time and cultivated soil will thus be a threat to this art. In fact it would seem possible to observe this conflict in the landscape image of the 15-16th centuries. The actual Renaissance – the revival of antiquity – has its roots in Italy, the homeland of antiquity, and here, with the emergence of the High Renaissance around 1500, we can observe a subduing of the landscape paradigm that was introduced around 1420 (FIG. II.58). From the 16th-18th centuries, the Counter Reformation centuries, a neo-classical art thus thrives in which landscapes are relatively non-dominant, timeless and uncultivated. In the Northern countries, on the other hand, the broad, descriptive, time-based and work-marked landscape image that was introduced in the 15th century is further developed (FIG. 22). There is harvesting and snowfall in Brueghel, but not in Michelangelo (FIGS. 23 and 24). Thus there is a direct line from Jan van Eyck to Brueghel and the 17th-century Dutch to the culmination of the landscape painting in the 19th century.

A kind of pictorial epicentre for the conflicts between neo-antique and modern, South and North, is found in the subject of chapter 12: the fantastic-looking rock formations which crop up in so many places in 15th-century Italian painting. Initially, these stone formations could be taken for a relapse to pre-modern rocky ground, but in the cool light of naturalism, idiosyncratic – almost surreal – traits are extracted: not merely organic or chaotic as before, but also artificial, suggestive of mine-work or ruins, as if we were dealing with half-finished architectural monuments (PLATE 8). Are we faced with a self-generating nature, which à la Golden Age

Fig. 23. Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *Adoration of the Magi in Winter Landscape* (1567), oil on wood. Winterthur, Sammlung Oskar Reinhart.

Fig. 24. Michelangelo, *The Conversion of Saul* (1542-45), fresco. Rome, Vatican, Cappella Paolina.

renders mine-work superfluous and thereby postpones the surrender to modernity yet again, or, on the contrary, are we looking at traces of usage following the dawning industrial civilisation? The answers are just as contradictory as was the self-perception of the times.

The differences between Northern modernity and Southern Renaissance that I identify here can be read as a generalisation of the observations made by Svetlana Alpers in her eminent study of Dutch art in the 17th century (1983). Whereas the pictorial gaze of antiquity and its Italian Renaissance successor can never forsake the body, the modern and Northern descendant has slipped definitively towards the environment. The modern pictorial gaze springs from the Gothic style with its myriad of details, non-bodily approach and celestial striving (FIG. 9.14). This is the subjective sight that cuts vertically through an outward gaze towards infinite space so that figures and surroundings become one, become *landscape*. The origin of this sight in the North is borne out by the fact that its most thorough expression, the autonomous landscape painting, is a phenomenon that both emerges, thrives and culminates north of the Alps.

VI

In order to give the reader a sense that landscape image paradigms are not merely intellectual constructs, chosen or rejected at one's discretion, but actually function as imprints of conditions of existence – *fields* – I will round off this introduction with the following case study from the Vatican Museum's Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini.

A mosaic depicting wild animals in a landscape is apparently a work of Roman antiquity found on the Aventine Hill some time during the 18th century (PLATE 9). But why does the mosaic include strikingly non-antique features such as: gentle mossy hills; a stout-trunked, firmly-rooted tree; a stream shimmering with white bubbles; groups of trees fading away in perspective on the other side of a hill; a natural arch, which is not monolithic but formed of granite boulder-like units; and – most remarkable of all – a group of clouds floating freely in space and turning grey as if a thunderstorm is brewing? Does this mosaic constitute the single striking exception which undermines the idea that antique pictorial art was actually executed within a fixed unwritten set of rules, a paradigm? Or could it, conversely, be the case that the existence of the paradigm should actually be taken as so specific that this mosaic is excluded from its province? All the above-mentioned landscape ingredients would seem to indicate post-medieval ideal or Romantic landscape images, not least Gainsborough's, and we might thus wonder if this is a forgery from the second half of the 18th century, made to satisfy the burgeoning market for mosaics from antiquity.

Even though the forger must be assumed to have made an effort to recreate an image in the landscape style of antiquity, he did not succeed in steering clear of the modern landscape paradigm. The paradigm was so much a part of the air he breathed that it had become invisible to himself and his audience. As the mosaic continues to hang in the Vatican Museum, it is apparently still invisible to the beholder today.[4] A study of the paradigms of the landscape image, their underlying *fields* and the entire evolutionary sequence that structures them would accordingly seem to be more than justified and necessary.

Jacob Wamberg

Landscape as World Picture

Tracing Cultural Evolution in Images

VOLUME I

From the Palaeolithic Period to the Middle Ages

Translated by Gaye Kynoch

Landscape as World Picture: Tracing Cultural Evolution in Images
Volume I: *From the Palaeolithic Period to the Middle Ages*

First published in Danish as *Landskabet som verdensbillede. Naturafbildning og kulturel evolution i Vesten fra hulemalerierne til den tidlige modernitet* by Passepartout, Aarhus, 2005

© Jacob Wamberg and Aarhus University Press 2009

Graphic design and cover: Jørgen Sparre
Cover illustration: Giovanni di Paolo, *Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise* (*c.* 1445), tempera and gold on wood. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.31) Photograph © 1985 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Typesetting: Narayana Press
Type: Legacy Serif and Legacy Sans
Paper: Lessebo Design Smooth and Hello Silk
Printed by Narayana Press, Denmark

Printed in Denmark 2009

ISBN 978 87 7934 287 3

AARHUS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Langelandsgade 177
DK - 8200 Aarhus N
www.unipress.dk

Gazelle Book Services Ltd.
White Cross Mills
Hightown, Lancaster, LA1 4XS
United Kingdom
www.gaxellebookservices.co.uk

The David Brown Book Company
Box 511
Oakville, CT 06779
USA
www.oxbowbooks.com

Published with the financial support of
The Aarhus University Research Foundation
The Danish Research Council for the Humanities (FKK)
The New Carlsberg Foundation
The Novo Nordisk Foundation