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THE SENSE OF NATURE AND ITS RELATION TO SPACE IN JAPAN

A Double Ambiguity

I SHALL avoid here the Danaid task of giving an accurate definition of the word 'nature'. Let it suffice to assume that its numerous accepted senses relate more or less to a primitive idea which, according to Lalande (1956: s.v. 'nature'), seems to have been that of a spontaneous development of the living, following a determined type. It is not necessary to expatiate on the fundamental ambivalence which arises from this association of spontaneity and determination: despite the long history of philosophical thought concerning nature both in the West and in the East (see, for example, Tajima *et al.* 1977, vol. 4; Kaneko *et al.* 1979; Iwata *et al.* 1976; Sagara *et al.* 1983), it is daily evident that this aboriginal ambiguity remains in common sense as well as in science.

With regard to spatial organization, another ambiguity must be taken into account—for in some cases nature can easily be related to space, and sometimes it cannot. When it means 'environment', 'nature' has some evident spatial connotations; but when it comes to, say, 'human nature', space is not so manifestly concerned—it could readily be thought that it is not concerned at all. It all depends on the definition of the word 'space'. In fact, space also is fundamentally ambiguous: it is around, but also within, any given human being. Land-forms are spatial in a sense, but in another sense mind-forms also are spatial. In the latter sense, human nature is neither less nor more spatial than any other phenomenon. Existence in general is a spatial phenomenon, as the very etymology of the word (*ex-sistere*) suggests.

Leaving aside etymological puns, I shall attempt below to give some further evidence of the relation between space and nature in the case of Japan, with the

help of the broad conceptual frame of cultural geography (see also Berque 1982, in press).

Space, Nature and Cultural Geography

Cultural geography is here intended as the study of the global and unitary subjective meaning and objective tendency which a society gives to its relationship with space and nature. This relationship, of which *landscape* is a concrete expression, is that which institutes a subject (individual or collective) in its environment: no subject without an environment, no environment without a subject. Both entities are relative, and their relation is ambivalent. This relation is also manifold or plurimodal. For the sake of exposition, one can broadly distinguish a technical mode, a sensitive mode, a spiritual mode and a political mode. All these modes are collectively integrated into the culturally specific relationship of a given society with space and nature. This means not only that none of them can be considered independently from the others, but also that there is no one-sided causal concatenation between any single mode and any other: all the modes are metaphorically present in any one mode of the relation. This entails that the relation be defined in terms of sets of analogies. In other words, the mental organization of space is analogous to its social and technical organization. Moreover, in each of these domains, nature is metaphorically converted into culture, and culture into nature; without such conversion, one would not be able to speak of environment (as an integrated whole) nor of subject (as an integrative whole, whether an individual or a group).

To understand how a given culture organizes its relationship with space and nature, we thus have to ponder how the above metaphor functions within this culture. This can be done in two ways: by analysing how landscapes are represented (in gardens, painting, literature etc.) and, more fundamentally, by analysing how landscape, as a relation, co-institutes its two terms: subject and environment. I shall start with this second aspect, namely, how does Japanese culture define subject and environment?

Subject and Environment

In many respects, the subject in general is less important in Japanese culture than in European culture—viz. it is the environment, in the Japanese case, that is more important. This tendency has been aptly defined as contextualism (*jōkyōshugi*) (see Hamaguchi 1977). The Japanese language, for instance, does not need to distinguish the subject from its environment in a statement like *samui* (both 'I am cold' and 'it is cold'). Nor does it distinguish the subject from the

object in a statement like *suki* ('[I] love [you]' or '[I] like [it]'). One is tempted to infer from Tsunoda's experiments (1979) that this tendency is already distinct at a neurological level, owing to the phonetic peculiarities of the Japanese language. We can also detect it in the Japanese bent for using onomatopoeias, which minimize conceptualization, i.e. the verbal distance between feeling and expression, between phenomenon and interpretation. The absence of personal pronouns in the strict sense, and especially the lack of a direct equivalent for *ego*, also show that the subject (both grammatical—*shugo*—and existential—*shutai*) is not so prominent as it is in European culture. In English or French etc., 'I' am I in any situation; but in Japanese, 'I' is a succession of terms (*watakushi*, *boku*, *ore* etc.) which are topologically determined by the environment. This means that what must be defined in the first place is not the subject, but the environment (see, for example, Suzuki 1973).

What does this debasement of the subject have to do with nature, and with metaphor? We must remember here one of the two primitive aspects of nature, namely spontaneity. Nature is that which develops itself by its own impetus (*onozukara*), without any external cause. Among such external causes is the integrative action which the subject exerts upon its environment, which entails that inasmuch as the subject is debased, nature is enhanced.

The fact is that Japanese culture values nature no less than it lowers the subject. The structural relation between these two tendencies is quite apparent in the functioning of the verbal forms *-reru*, *-rareru*, which express respect, spontaneity, possibility and also what we call the passive voice—but a 'passive' where the action does not necessarily need an agent (see Araki 1980)! In *Tarō ga kita* ('Tarō came'), the action is expressed in the active voice; but in *sensei ga korareta* ('the professor came'), the same action is expressed in this so-called 'passive' voice. This means that to show his respect the speaker minimizes the predicative link between subject and action. At a higher degree of honorific speech he will say *sensei ga o-ide ni narimashita*, which literally means that the subject's action is replaced by an event, something which 'became' (*narimashita*) by itself, spontaneously, naturally. On the contrary, the speaker expresses his humility by insisting on what one might call the factitiveness of his own action (e.g. in *o-okuri itashimasu*, literally '[I] make [myself] accompany [you]') (Hashimoto, cited in Makino 1978: 36).

These examples show that respect is linked to naturalness (spontaneity of events independently from the subject), and humility to artificiality (exertion of the subject's power). This must, on the one hand, be related to the well-known valuation of nature in Japanese art and morals, and, on the other, to the devaluation of the self which again is so conspicuous in Japanese culture.

But here arises a problem. If the integrative power of the subject is lowered, then where does the unity of the world proceed from? It is not enough to show, for instance, that the grammatical subject can be suppressed; one must also explain how this can happen without causing the sentence to disintegrate. One must likewise understand how the existing subject can be topologically related to a spontaneous environment instead of actively ordering it around itself; in other words, how culture may be put on even terms with nature.

Recent studies, such as those by Nakamura (1983) and Sakabe (1980, 1982), on Nishida Kitarō's philosophy and on Tokieda Motoki's linguistics have thrown quite suggestive light on this problem. Both theories lead to the idea that the opposition between subject and object, between self and non-self, appears only at a certain level, while at another level both terms merge. Tokieda stressed the importance of *bamen* (scene, place), and Nishida that of *basho* (place); both more or less mean that the subject cannot transcend the context. Although they did not elaborate this involuntary correlation, they were thus defining a logic which seems to lie at the core of Japanese culture. Nishida called this logic *basho no ronri*, the logic of place, and stressed that, contrary to the Western tradition, which since Aristotle has been centred on the subject (*shugo no ronri*), this is centred on the predicate (*jutsugo no ronri*). In such a logic—which Silvano Arieti (quoted in Nakamura 1983: 105) called 'paleologic' and detected on the one hand in schizophrenia, and on the other in symbolism and creativity—two particular entities can be assimilated if they possess a common concrete predicate. In a subject-centred logic, however, one can do so only inasmuch as these particulars are abstractly included in the same general category. In other words, metaphor operates at the level of the predicate, and it operates the more easily as this level is given precedence over the level of the subject—because, at the subject's level, A can never be non-A, and self can never be non-self.

Given that the propensity for lowering the grammatical subject and enhancing the predicate is clearly inscribed in the very structure of the Japanese language—exactly as, in social behaviour, the existing subject complies with the determinations of each place (*basho*)—we can more easily understand why Japanese culture so persistently placed nature and the natural at the acme of culturalness (Berque 1983a): this is because it tends to rely on metaphorical assimilation rather than on categorical articulation to unify its world. This tendency must be related to the long tradition which, in Japanese thought, pleads for the rejection of egocentrism (*mushi*, *muga* etc.), i.e. the debasement of the subject's proper substance, in favour of its relation to the context. The less substance A is endowed with, the more easily can it be assimilated to non-A. It is no casual homonymy that *muga* can both mean 'non-self', and also imply anti-substantialism in Buddhist thought. As the poet says, *mono ni yosete omoi wo nobu* (Karaki 1976: vol. 1, p. 4): things will express my heart, because my heart is metaphorically embodied in them. Things *are* my heart, environment *is* the subject—because, fundamentally, all substantial particulars (*kobutsu*) are resolved into the insubstantial set of relations, or ambience, which define a given place (*basho*).

This metaphorical process works, of course, at the heart of any culture; but a sense of place (*bashosei*) is particularly pronounced in cultures which, as in the Japanese case, do not enhance the subject's pre-eminence to the degree European culture has done. This culture less easily assimilates itself to nature because, fundamentally, the subject's spontaneous self-definition, or particularity, acts in opposition to the spontaneous definition, or naturalness, of its environment.

Landscape Metaphors and Metonymies

Many other mechanisms account for the above-mentioned assimilation; for there are no definite causal links in metaphors, and especially so amongst those concerning such a global relation as that which exists between culture and nature, society and space. I propose calling this global relation 'the territorial metaphor'.

One of the most prominent factors operating here is related to the traditional intensiveness of human labour in agricultural practices. It has been said that Japanese agriculture was a prolongation of the land (*daichi no enchō*), whereas European agriculture was a prolongation of the hand (*te no enchō*) (Tamaki 1976). This means that, in Japan, technological progress acted mainly in favour of the productivity of land, whereas in Europe it acted mainly in favour of the productivity of labour. In Europe, human action could thus be distinguished from nature more easily than it could be in Japan, where fertility depended largely on the investment of many generations of human toil on the ground, and for that reason was not distinct as such from natural fertility. Embedded in the earth, culture merged with nature, and labour looked natural. In other words, subjective naturalness was proportional to objective artificiality.

To be sure, such conditions have much in common with other rice-growing societies in East and South Asia. They only give an ecological basis to the other elements of the metaphor. Among these elements, one must consider what kinds of association were established by the Japanese between the most typical land-forms of their environment and the other schemata of their culture; in other words, how land-forms—the most concrete aspect of nature and space—were culturalized, or landscaped. The recent works of Higuchi (1975, 1981) are very illuminating in this respect. On the basis of the historical association of certain sites and certain cultural facts (mainly literary, pictorial and religious traditions), this author has defined a series of basic morphological types, which he calls *furusato no genkei* (archetypes of the homeland)—for example the Akitsushima-Yamato type (small plain surrounded by mountains), the Komoriku type (innermost part of a valley) etc. Some of these archetypes relate to geomantic principles inherited from the Chinese *fengshui* system, but on the whole, Higuchi's interpretation owes more to Bachelardian and Jungian symbolism. He insists particularly on the motherliness (*bosei*) of the most typical Japanese landscapes, the acme of which is attained in caldeira lakes (e.g. Lake Towada), where water conjugates with enclosure and depth.

Although Higuchi refers explicitly to Kawai Hayao's works (e.g. 1976), his theory itself is an excellent example of how territorial metaphors work, in that it confuses a cultural trait (the motherliness of Japanese society) with a natural one (the so-called 'motherliness of nature' in Japan). Without such a confusion, landscape would not exist, because landscape is both an imprint and a matrix (Berque 1984). It is not only a projection of culture (here the motherliness of society applied to nature); it is also a reverberating focus, which strengthens and defines cultural traits by giving them a tangible basis. In this way, it is true to say than nature, in Japan, is fraught with motherliness, but it is true only as far as the

Japanese are concerned: another society would have seen the same islands differently.

Other aspects of the territorial metaphor proceed from explicit moral and aesthetic codifications. By way of its traditions, culture establishes definite links between nature, places and feelings. This is particularly the case in Japan, where the tradition of *meisho* (famous places) has been brought to a degree of standardization which one can hardly find anywhere else in the world. Owing to this standardization, a given place-name automatically evokes a given literary figure and a given feeling (Pigeot 1982). Of course, this also depends on the educational level of the people concerned; and such associations change with education itself. It is, for instance, doubtful that today, when passing along the Tōmei Expressway by the foot of Mount Fuji, every Japanese thinks of Ariwara no Narihira turning his long sleeve to sing an elegy, of Saigyō's wanderings or of the Soga brothers fighting each other, as Kojima Usui could still write two generations ago (quoted in Katsuhara 1979: 94). Nevertheless, through new types of media such as television and records of popular songs, old or new stereotypes more than ever display one of the fundamental mechanisms of landscape—the metonymy with which a place is intermingled with its name and with a definite set of cultural facts. A good example of this metonymy can be found in the *misaki shirōzu* (a series of songs about promontories) which raged in the 'seventies. Singers like Katō Tokiko with *Shiretoko no misaki*, Mori Shin'ichi with *Erimo misaki*, and Ishikawa Sayuri with *Tsugaru kaikyō*, briefly succeeded in integrating such notions of archetypal landscapes into the nature of northern Japan.

Ways of seeing nature and space can, of course, be expressed more concretely than by words. Landscape painting and gardens display this materializing property, which obeys the same cultural logic as landscape in general. The same *meisho*, for example, as represented in literature, also appeared in screen painting, woodcut prints, gardens, etc. The stylization of these *meisho* gave rise, on the one hand, to a set of quite stable schemata, through which the Japanese both perceived and represented their environment (for a good survey see Nakamura 1982 and also Berque 1983b). Some of these schemata, like the ubiquitous 'eight landscapes' (*hakkei*), take their origin in China (the *bajing* located near the Xiang and Xiao rivers), or in pure mythology (e.g. the traditions of Mount Sumeru, or Shumisen, and of Mount Penglai, or Hōrai); but over the centuries they have been assimilated or connected with other schemata which may originate in real Japanese landscapes. Mount Fuji gives probably the best illustration of these associations, or *mitate* (Isozaki 1983). It is associated with Shumisen, with many cone-shaped mountains throughout Japan, with sand-heaps in front of shrines, with fans, with the character for 'eight', with wistaria, etc.—each of these associations in its turn giving rise to other associations. The *mitate* can also be reversed (*gyaku mitate*). This is the case of the famous Itsukushima shrine, a demiurgic *mitate* modelled by Taira no Kiyomori after a garden which itself was the *mitate* of a real landscape.

Liminality and Nature

We have seen above that the predicate-centred logic, which one can detect in language and in some other Japanese cultural traits, favours metaphors. Metaphors seem also to be favoured by the debasement of substance, and by the corresponding enhancement of relation. The question now is whether one can find places which materially correspond to this double propensity in the Japanese way of organizing space. To be sure, any place and any object can be the setting of some sort of symbolism; but certain places are so more than others, and this is especially true when it comes to the metaphor of transforming culture into nature (and reciprocally).

In fact, it is language which again gives us the clue, with the word *en*. Its accepted senses, all centring on the notion of relation, encompass a wide range of mental, social and material facts. This multiplicity, and the frequency of the corresponding uses, reveals the accent which Japanese culture puts on intermediation or transition in general. *En* is the place where this process occurs. It is neither A nor B, but a threshold in-between, participating in both terms. And just as mediation is valued, so are the mediators—persons, things or places—which embody this liminality: they relate to a level which is felt to be superior to the level of the particular terms which are connected through them. In brief, *en* is where metaphor takes place.

Let me give a few examples of this function in the domain of architecture and urbanism. The best known is certainly the *en* or *engawa*, a platform bordering the traditional Japanese house. The *engawa* is neither inside nor outside; it participates in both house (representing culture) and garden (representing nature), and thus enables both terms to merge into each other. This mediatory function of the *en* has been systematically introduced in modern buildings by architects like Kurokawa Kishō, whose Bank of Fukuoka, for instance, shelters a semi-public square, with some green plots, under a wide projection jutting out of its tenth floor.

The close relation between mediation and moral valuation is conspicuous in *chinju no mori*, the groves which surround tutelary shrines. One cannot proceed to the shrine without crossing the grove. In fact, as Maki Fumihiko writes (1980), the sacredness of the former is proportional to the impression of depth (*okusei*) which this crossing produces. The liminality here refers directly to nature—both from a botanical point of view, for the *chinju no mori* are among the few remnants of the laurisylvan forest (*shōyōjurin*) which once covered the plains of Japan, and from a symbolic point of view, for the topical and seemingly aboriginal gods that are revered in the shrines root local society into the ground. Hence the grove acts as a natural threshold between society and the supernatural. It must be stressed that, between the realm of man and that of the gods, nature conspicuously intervenes; the Japanese way of organizing space systematically provides such points of transition.

Liminality is linked to nature in other ways too. Japanese notions of space dislike general coordinates and perspectives. They refer rather to local, concrete landmarks. Even some systematic grid systems, like the *gobannome* in Hokkaido,

are oriented according to local topography, not to cosmology. Each place tends to be organized spontaneously, following its own logic and its topological relation with its direct neighbours, instead of general, geometrical, supra-local systems (Inoue 1969). This lococentrism, or spontaneity, entails a valuation of liminality, inasmuch as mediatory space smooths the transition between two otherwise heterogeneous places. Here is at work, in urbanistic terms, the logic which we have already noted in philosophical and linguistic terms, and which can be called a spontaneous topogenesis. This topogenesis tends to reject the integrative order that the subject (which might here be the State) tends to impose upon the world. In that sense, the Japanese sense of space values naturalness.

Edo was, and Tokyo still is, a good illustration of this. Even the grid system in Shitamachi was natural in some ways (Takatani 1980), not to speak of the Yamanote quarters, with their wide parks and their road system directly derived from previous natural paths. It was not a unitary system, but a mosaic of grids, each oriented by a natural landmark (such as Mount Fuji, Mount Tsukuba, Kanda Heights etc.). These grids were generally left apart, opening into nature in the botanical sense: little woods were thus—spontaneously—interspersed throughout the city. In fact, being so numerous, these junctions between heterogeneous orientations—e.g. between two or more roads (*chumata*), or between bridges and roads (*hashizume*)—can be considered as a latent urbanistic principle: that of a ‘city with crevices’ (*sukima no aru toshi*) (Wakatsuki 1980). These crevices were not only spontaneously filled with natural vegetation; they also opened, through nature, to the supernatural, for they were generally the site of shrines dedicated to liminary gods (*sae no kami*) etc. We find here again a metaphor between nature and culture, by way of liminality and an adequate spatial organization.

Conclusion

I have tried to relate nature and culture, in the Japanese case, by showing that this relation has a spatial expression, both abstract and concrete, both symbolic and actual; and that the search for analogies between these various dimensions may aid a better understanding of each of them. Of course, this enquiry is itself highly analogical and approximative; but since the global relation of society to nature and space (i.e. landscape) is in itself metaphorical, the only pertinent approach is a metaphorical one, coupled with reflection about metaphors. The clues must be searched for in the way each society sees its environment, and what it feels, says, paints, writes, desires, decides and does about it. Happily, Japan offers much material in that sense.

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JAMES VALENTINE

DANCE SPACE, TIME AND ORGANIZATION: ASPECTS OF JAPANESE CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

WITH the aim of studying dance in Japan, problems of definition immediately arise. The resolution of difficulties specific to dance research in Japan, however, depends partly on a more general characterization of dance for anthropological purposes. Of the few general texts devoted to the anthropology of dance, most include at least one chapter on the question of definition, coming up with their own criteria for what counts as dance. Aspects of both movement and motive tend to be included, so that common to the definitions is an emphasis on non-verbal body movements deliberately patterned or fashioned in a way that transcends utility.¹ This 'patterning' involves the organization of movement in time and space, as noted by several writers. Royce for example, in reviewing various methods of dance notation, observes (1977: 45, 50) that Labanotation includes reference to both the time value and the direction of movement, and Effort-Shape notation refers both to exertions of the body in time and positions of the body in space. Lange similarly argues (1975: 36-7) that form in dance is composed of the rhythmic pattern that shapes the flow of movement in time, together with the spatial properties of movement.

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1. These aspects are especially emphasised in the definitions provided by Hanna 1979: 19 and Royce 1977: 8. Transcendence of utility is also stressed by Kurath 1960: 234 and Lange 1975: 57.