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Preface

Landscape has been a crucial concept to produce, store, and to present knowledge on human–environment interactions in various academic disciplines and in works of art. It has been bemoaned that the concept is ambiguous and inadequate for scientific discourses because of its vagueness, its equivocalness, and its proneness to ideological cooptation. The sheer number of attempts at a more precise definition bespeaks the uneasiness scientists feel when dealing with the term. Despite its analytical shortcomings the use of landscape as a key concept to analyse and interpret human–environment interaction is rather increasing than decreasing.

Not only have the cultural studies discovered the term with its unrivalled appeal to stress boundedness, integration, and heterogeneity at the same time, but also anthropology, cultural studies, and history have undergone a spatial turn during the last two decades integrating the landscape concept into their disciplinary lexicon. By refocussing on the landscape concept historians and anthropologists emphasise that environments and historical and cultural processes are linked by a great number of interrelated feedback loops. Landscapes are not merely scenery and stage but are intimately interwoven with history and culture. At the same time the concept is reevaluated in the geosciences where it had been discarded since the 1970s in favour of more problem-centred and less ambiguous concepts. Landscape also has a continued appeal to artists expressing their thoughts and feelings about man’s placement in and interaction with nature (Schama, 1995).

The widespread use of the landscape concept corresponds with an era in which global environmental change has indeed changed most natural landscapes into heavily used environments. Various land-use activities have transformed large parts of the globe’s surface and human activities have appropriated one third to one half of global ecosystem production (Foley et al., 2005, p. 570). Croplands and pastures constitute major parts of the planet’s surface. The clearing of tropical forests may lead to drier and warmer regional climates in the near future, whereas the clearing of boreal forests may result in cooler climates in the North (Nemani et al., 2003).

Escobar’s claim (1999, p. 1) that we have entered an epoch which is defined by the sense of being “after nature” is as true as his tenet that geocological processes are increasingly reshaped by human activities and constituted by discursive practices. Escobar’s claim resounds with the wording of Noble Prize laureate Paul Crutzen, who has named the recent geological phase “anthropocene” (Crutzen & Steffen, 2003). Crutzen and Escobar emphasise the increasing human
dependence on these very processes and resources and the growing understanding
that major environmental processes are beyond the control of humans: even if
we succeed in reducing CO₂ output the effects of global warming will transform
landscapes profoundly over the next decades to come (IPCC, 2007). Glaciers
will vanish and coastal areas will become inundated; some deserts may expand
and others shrink. Large dams, water carriers, and the expansion of megacities
transform landscapes as much as the artificial exclusion of humans from specific
sites and entire biomes designated as parks and wilderness areas. However, our
potential to control and correct geoecological processes is very limited. Escobar’s
emphasis that environments resist being fully coopted by humans, is borne out by
numerous contemporary reports on major catastrophes and the increasing vulner-
ability of ecosystems.

As human–environment feedback loops define most of the basic stressors
that constitute “human life” in relation to both biology and geoecological proc-
cesses, there is a need for an interdisciplinary approach to landscape research. It is
odd that most of the current literature is usually linked more or less clearly to one
scientific field, either being affiliated with the natural sciences or the humanities.
True interdisciplinary approaches to landscapes bridging this gap are exceedingly
rare. It is here that this volume wants to make an impact: over the past ten years
the contributors to this volume have cooperated in an interdisciplinary programme
– the Collaborative Research Centre ACACIA (Arid Climate, Adaptation and
Cultural Innovation in Africa) – dealing with the interrelation between cultural
processes and geoecological dynamics in Africa’s arid areas. The concept ‘land-
scape’ has been crucial in all projects, be they Egyptological, Africanist, anthro-
pological, geographical, botanical, historical, or archaeological.

The attempt to work along a unified definition of the landscape concept
was given up early on. Rather it was deemed to be more rewarding to have each
discipline explore its own access to the topic and from there explore bridges
between different disciplinary approaches. The belief in a diversity of landscape
approaches made it necessary to explicate the epistemological fundamentals of
one’s own conceptual base. However, there has been a basic understanding that
‘for constructivists, the challenge lies in learning to incorporate into their analy-
yses the biophysical basis of reality; for realists it is examining their frameworks
from the perspective of their historical constitution’ (Escobar, 1999, p. 3).

Michael Bollig and Olaf Bubenzer

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In the following chapter I trace the history of the landscape concept. I especially focus on the tradition of the landscape concept in German thought, mainly because I think that the changing interpretations of the concept and the multiple layers of meaning are rewarding to an archaeology of landscape concepts. The landscape concept in German thought resounds with ambiguities and puts the risks of ideological cooptation into focus. In contrast to this the meaning of landscape seems to have been more stable in the English and French tradition. On the other hand the German landscape concept has profoundly influenced the thinking about landscapes in diverse sciences. Franz Boas for example took on the idea of the landscape from Herder and the early nineteenth century geographer Carl Ritter (Boas, 1887, pp. 137ff.), who both opted for a holistic approach to human–environment relations and the historical dimension of these relations.

The idea that a peculiar landscape, a people, and its history were intimately linked and unique became a key idea in early twentieth century U.S. anthropology. The founding father of academic German geography, Friedrich Ratzel, had a profound effect on Frederick Jackson Turner’s ideas on the relation amongst geology, biology, and history (N. Finzsch, personal communication, 2007). Ratzel (1882/1891) had argued in his two volumes on anthropogeography that human societies can only be successful as long as they adapt to geophysical givens of specific landscapes. Turner applied these ideas to his historical model of the American frontier (Turner, 1920) which was largely influential in American historiography. Phenomenological approaches to landscapes such as advocated by one of the founding fathers of U.S. American geography, Carl O. Sauer (see Sauer,
1925), are linked to similar approaches in German geography (see, e.g., Hettner, 1923, but also earlier writers such as Carl Ritter).

Carl Troll, a highly influential geographer in Germany between the 1930s and 1960s coined the term landscape ecology (Lauer, 1976) in an attempt to re-focus the concept, which had been tarnished with fascist and racist ideas during the early decades of the twentieth century. Influenced by aerial photographs that, for the first time, were available with a wide coverage, he underlined a natural sciences perspective to landscapes and saw the analysis of flows and feedback loops between different elements of the system as the key to the analysis of landscapes (Troll, 1970).

1. ETHYMOLOGY

Today we are confronted with two rather dissimilar definitions of the term landscape: whereas the Oxford English Dictionary explains landscape as ‘view’, ‘prospect’, and ‘representation’ of ‘natural inland scenery’, a standard German dictionary (Duden Wörterbuch) defines the German word Landschaft as ‘part, section of land surface . . . shaped in a particular way with regard to its external appearance.’ (quoted after Luig & von Oppen, 1997, p. 9). Much of the recent debate on this term gives evidence of a cleft between naturalistic and mentalistic approaches and I spend some time explaining from where the different meanings come. During the past 1000 years the concept was enriched with various layers of meaning linking political, ecological, and cognitive aspects of human–environment relations and through the course of history the landscape concept has absorbed meanings in different European historical contexts.

The term Landschaft (landscape) is derived from the Germanic verbal abstract *skapi which can be translated with composition or nature, *skapi itself being derived from skapjan, to create (Müller, 1977, p. 4). Words to which the verbal abstract was attached were either abstract nouns, collective nouns, or expressions of spatiality such as the old English burhscipe (urban area) or nidscipe (badness) or the old Saxon term heriskepi, as part of a territory. In old German the term landscaf alluded to the quality of a larger settlement area (Müller, 1977, p. 6). It then referred to the social institutions of an area and in an extended meaning to the land in which such norms were adhered. There is little evidence that the old German landscaf referred to natural features of a settlement area. In several medieval texts landscaf is used as a translation for the Latin term provincia. Notker (ad 950–1022), a monk working from St. Gallen, defines landscaf as ‘provincia is diu lantscaf. Regio dû gibûrda. Mâmage regions mugen sîn in êinero prouincia.’ (transl.: ‘Provincia is the landscape. Regio is the inhabited land/landscape. Several regions can constitute a province’, quoted after Müller, 1977, p. 6). In contrast to this the Latin term terra referring to the earth’s surface, is rarely translated with lantscaf. Already in medieval German the older meaning of norms and standards of a people shaping (creating) a particular lant,
was gradually replaced by a new use of the term. Then \textit{lantschaft} referred to the knights and/or the political elite of a given area. In Gottfried of Straßburg’s \textit{Tristan} (1980, p. 394) the narrator, for example, says ‘\textit{Do kom al die lantschaft/und volkes ein so michel kraft}’ (transl. ‘There came all the knights of the region and so many people’) thereby clearly juxtaposing the \textit{lantschaft} (the knights of the region) from the \textit{volk} (the people). From here it was just a small step to the late medieval use of the term as ‘council of estates’ or ‘council of political representatives of an area’. In the German language this meaning of \textit{landschaft} was retained well into the nineteenth century and a dictionary from the 1830s (\textit{Allgemeine deutsche Realencyklopädie,} 1830, p. 427) still gives this meaning.

During the Renaissance the content of the term changes once again. During the early Renaissance in Northern Italy urban elites attached strong aesthetic connotations to adjoining rural areas and a special way of painting landscapes emerged (Luig & von Oppen, 1997, p. 10; Daniels & Cosgrove, 1988, p. 5), which subjects were rural scenes, nature as viewed by urban elites. Whereas in the Middle Ages landscapes had remained in the background of paintings and had been reduced to allegoric representations, in the early sixteenth century landscapes became the focus of paintings. It is first in the southwest of Germany that landscape (\textit{landschafft}) takes this alternative aesthetic meaning. In 1525 Albrecht Altdorfer painted \textit{Donaulandschaft mit Schloss bei Wörth} (Danube Landscape with Castle near Wörth) which is reckoned to be the first painting which has a landscape as its sole focus (see Figure 1). It is perceivable that during this period the concept landscape gained a new meaning, implicating the view of a detached but interested observer in a rural landscape.

New technical aids such as the \textit{camera obscura} and the \textit{velum} were used to create a three-dimensional space and to depict landscapes in perspective. Furthermore the development of oil painting in the Netherlands allowed for a more intense portrayal of the play of light and shadow in a landscape. From the middle of the sixteenth century Dutch landscape painting flourished connected to names such as Pieter Brueghel and Hieronymus Bosch in an older school of landscape painters and van Goyen and van Ruisdael in a later school of landscape artists. The Dutch use of landscape (\textit{landschap}) in connection with artistic but naturalistic depictions of landscapes is then transported into English, where we find this use of the term during the latter part of the sixteenth century (Hirsch, 1995, p. 2; Forman & Godron, 1986, pp. 5ff.). Whereas in German alternative meanings of landscape coexisted, in English landscape took on the meaning of a visual representation of rural scenery.

Whereas the aesthetic use of the term dominated in English, in the German language the term also became applied to segments of the earth and closely tied to what was conceptualised as nature. Luig and von Oppen (1997, p. 12) point out that at the same time the concept ‘nature’, originally describing the quality of something, became an abstract singular denoting prediscursive aspects of life and was conceptualised as an antidote to culture (see also Casimir, 2007). This wedge between nature and culture then became an essential part of the landscape
concept over the next centuries. Only when nature was differentiated from culture on epistemological grounds could the landscape concept take on connotations of natural structures and processes. Josuua Maaler’s Latin dictionary edited in 1561

Figure 0.1. Albrecht Altdorfer, Danube Landscape with Castle near Wörth (Courtesy Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz) (See also Color Plates)
in Zürich takes landschaft as land (in contrast to water) and translates the term with the Latin tractus which is a smaller well-defined spatial unit (Müller, 1977, p. 9) (and not with provincia as with Notker some 500 years earlier). Parallel to landscape painting, cartography became another, scientific way to approach and represent the structures and details of landscapes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (on the development of cartography as an early branch of geography see Bagrow & Skelton, 1964; Harley & Woodward, 1987; Burnett, 1999; see also Figure 2).

Bollig and Heinemann (2002) trace, for the southwestern part of the African continent, how maps containing fictitious and narrated elements characteristic for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were replaced by more naturalistic maps during the second part of the nineteenth century.

An aesthetic interpretation of the landscape concept prevailed and during the Romantic period, landscape representations were not only popular in writing, painting, and music (Kuzniar, 1988) but also became imbued with a specific morality. Landscape was good to think about and – in contemporary terms – allusions to one’s rootedness in the landscape were politically correct. Especially in Germany landscape poetry became emblematic for the political movement propagating a German national identity. Whereas earlier Renaissance paintings had mainly portrayed encultured landscapes with buildings and other signs of human settlement, now wilderness as much as settled landscapes became topics for popular presentations.

Figure 0.2. Pieter Brueghel; The Fall of the Icarus (Courtesy Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz) (See also Color Plates)
Landscape painters of the Romantic period sought the sublime in landscapes; rarely were their paintings meant to be objective representations of landscapes (Kuzniar, 1988). They were meant to symbolise transcendent relations between humans, God, and nature and were media for introspection and religious experience and on the other hand, Romantic landscape paintings contained implicit political messages: German nationalism, for example, finds its expression in the choice of special landscapes or landscape elements (e.g., oak, fir tree). Tieck’s description of the Alps or Caspar David Friedrich’s paintings of rural scenes (Körner, 1995, see also Rössler, this volume) described awe-inspiring nature and pointed out correlations between human emotions, national identity, and particular features of a landscape. Landscapes were imbued with a political meaning as ideas on the agreement between the character of a nation and the features of the landscape it inhabited became prominent (see, e.g., Heinrich von Kleist, Clemens Brentano in Apel, 2000).

The link between landscape and identity became a salient topic of the arts but also of discourses in incipient academic disciplines such as history and geography. Von Humboldt used the concept in the 1840s as an umbrella term to describe the ‘totality of a part of the earth’ (Humboldt, 1845) and pleaded for a naturalistic approach to landscapes. His landscape depictions contained many scribblings specifying elevation, topography, and vegetation (see Figure 3).

In the 1880s Grimm and Grindel (1885, p. 131) defined *Landschaft* as (1) region, land complex in relation to its position and natural characteristics and (2) the artistic representation of such a region (Grimm & Grindel, 1885, p. 131). Luig and von Oppen (1997, p. 11) argue that at the turn of the twentieth century landscape identities in Europe became popularised and politicised, when at the same time the landscape concept was elevated to a key concept of scientific geoeconomic enquiry. Whereas in the German language the natural sciences approach to the landscape concept came to coexist with a politicised (landscape as identity) and with an artistic and at times metaphysical meaning (landscapes as reflection of transcended or psychological realities), in the English language the artistic meanings of the term predominated clearly (as it did in French).

The German geographer Hard (1969) made an effort to account for the rise and the demise of the landscape concept in various disciplines in Western Europe since the late nineteenth century. He sampled titles of books and articles which had incorporated the landscape concept and then counted the different types of meanings that occurred. An initial finding showed that since the 1880s the use of the landscape concept had increased rapidly. Apparently the concept was enthusiastically embraced by intellectuals with a background in the humanities. Only since the 1920s did geography as a discipline take on the cover term as a leading concept. Taking off from the perspective Alexander von Humboldt had cherished, Passarge (1921) and Hettner (1923) developed *Landschaftskunde* – although with different approaches – to a dominating branch of geography. They looked for clearly discernible types of landscape and tried to understand their peculiar characteristics (see also definition of *Landschaft* in Meyers Lexikon, 1939, p. 210). Passarge (1921, p. 217) emphasises the natural components of the landscape and maintains that a landscape is established by features of the ‘solid earth
Figure 0.3. Humboldt, ‘Geographie der Pflanzen in den Tropenländern’ (geography of plants in the tropic countries; Courtesy Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz) (See also Color Plates)
surface’ (*feste Erdrinde*; topography, rock stratum, soils, and climate). A landscape in Passarge’s methodology is set up by various discernible parts (see Figure 4).

Hettner (1923) criticises Passarge for only focussing on inorganic nature and vegetation when discussing landscapes and proposes that human interaction with geoeccological processes must be part of the landscape analysis. The differentiation between cultural and natural landscapes became a major classificatory achievement of this period (see especially Sauer, 1925). Hard shows that in Germany between 1910 and 1940 landscape became a dominant concept in the humanities, in geography, and in artistic presentations. Progressively the landscape concept was (mis)used to present the vitality and forces connecting a physical landscape

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**Figure 0.4.** Panorama illustrating clearly discernible types and peculiar characteristics of landscape (Passarge, 1921)