Landscape: the Dual Construction

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More than 150 years ago, the conservative cultural theorist and folklorist Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl asserted that every age had its specific "eye for landscape." What seemed ugly to one century was beautiful to another. During the "pig-tail period" (the 1770s and 1780s), the Black Forest had been seen as barren and unpleasant, but in Riehl's day it was discovered as a picturesque landscape.[1] If this observation is true, Clio is beginning to develop a keener eye for landscape in our time. The changing landscape and the changing gaze at the landscape have been topics of historical study for some years now.

A study of the landscape of the autobahn requires that one address, at least conceptually, what is meant by landscape. For it was landscape, not environment or nature, that was the goal and effect—or at least the contested entity—for the roadway planning under examination here. All participating social groups—from landscape architects and roadway engineers to journalists, landscape painters, novelists, and the users of the autobahn—mostly had landscape in mind when they spoke or wrote about the spatial consequences of the roads. Consciously or not, they were tapping into one of the most complex discourses of modernity. A quick glance at the geographic, art-historical, philosophical, and historical literature about the concept of "landscape" already reveals that we are dealing with an ambiguous and multivalent term that resists a convenient definition. The landscape ecologist Ludwig Trepl has emphasized that landscape is at the heart of the most diverse discourses.[2] Since the contemporary landscape concept represents the confluence of various traditions, identifying an unbroken and coherent landscape concept would amount to an analytically useless narrowing.

The easiest approach for historians is to refer to landscape as a political entity. As early as the Frankish kingdom of the Middle Ages, landscape names acquired importance as jurisdictional, administrative, fiscal, or seigneurial elements for organizing space. In the estate-based structure of the territorial state, *Landschaft*

was seen as the totality of the estates vis-à-vis the prince. As late as 1953, administrative units of provincial self-administration in North Rhine-Westphalia were set up, following the Prussian model, as *Landschaftsverbände.* All these administrative and political conceptions of landscape will be intentionally ignored here, since this level of the landscape concept is of little help to an analysis of technological landscapes.[3]

Instead, it is useful, in the aftermath of the misleading dichotomy between technology and nature mentioned above, to posit landscape and technology not as a pair of opposites, but as a complementary continuum in which humans and nature have made a place for themselves. As David Nye has said: "Technology is not alien to nature, but integral to it." Landscapes, in other words, are not static places, but "changing sites where new meanings are constantly emerging."[4] It is therefore important to see landscapes as construed both physically and socially at the same time: they are not only imagined as pictures in the mind, but are simultaneously constructed with shovels, backhoes, tar, and concrete.

Physically altered landscapes

On the one hand, natural spaces, especially in densely settled Central Europe, have been used, altered, and shaped by humans for millennia.[5] Hardly a blade of grass grows without human influence or use. Historians would do well to neither celebrate nor lament this circumstance, but simply to note and examine it in all its complexity. Riehl coined the phrase "cultural landscape" (*Kulturlandschaft*) for such areas, and it is relevant for geography and landscape studies. Transportation routes such as railroads and roadways are prominent elements of these cultural landscapes.[6] Railroad embankments and autobahn tunnels profoundly alter the topography. Such infrastructures are superimposed upon other types of uses, such as agriculture, forestry, and commerce outside of urban agglomerations, and evolved cityscapes within cities. It would be false, however, to think of the growth of traffic corridors as the transformation of formerly static landscapes. Rather, changes to the landscape, though varying in intensity, have always been a consequence and companion of human history.[7] The notion that preindustrial landscapes are necessarily intact and harmonious, and that landscapes in the industrial age are always destructive, is therefore not tenable and a topic for scholarship rather than a heuristic device. Furthermore, Hansjörg Küster has shown that the dynamic of the human impact on landscape is added to the natural dynamic of landscape transformation. Already before the Neolithic revolution, and thus before the massive impact of humans on the landscape in Central Europe, landscape was in a fundamental process of change. As a result, the static idea of nature protection, the preservation of traditional landscape types, could thus have very ironic consequences—not only that protected landscapes are the product of human activity (as, for example, the Lüneburg Heath, one of Germany's oldest nature parks), but that constant interventions are necessary to

preserve the appearance of the ensemble and retard the natural dynamic. The notion of a static landscape was given up in the biological sciences only in the second half of the twentieth century.[8]

Culturally altered landscapes

On the other hand, landscapes are socially constructed, since they privilege a particular "way of seeing," as the cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove put it. The contemplation of a landscape, whether from a moving car or a lookout tower, is a cultural practice that builds on other cultural practices. In art history, landscape was, from the late Middle Ages, a technical term for a painting depicting a slice of nature. Both the term and the genre emerged over five hundred years ago and dominated landscape painting into the twentieth century.[9] In the fifteenth century, landscape emancipated itself into an autonomous subject, turning from an illustrative background for narrative stories from nonreligious literature and the Bible into a theme in its own right. The formerly abstract landscape became recognizable and quotidian.[10] In the last years of the sixteenth century, *Landschaft* traveled from southwest German attestations via the Netherlands to England, where, as landscape, it became a genre term and loanword in the English language.[11] Since the Romantic period, in particular, certain types of landscapes were invested with national attributes as a way of simultaneously creating and illustrating the link between nature and nation.[12] The most prominent German example is the Romantic mystification and quasireligiosity in some of the paintings by Caspar David Friedrich, whom contemporary critics already accused of "pathological emotion."[13] This kind of criticism did not detract from the tremendous public reception of these works. In fact, Friedrich's readily accessible and understandable symbolism allowed his elevation of nature into the realm of the metaphysical to become one of the best-known facts of German landscape painting.

Informative and revealing from the perspective of the history of the environment and of technology are the depictions of railroad journeys in the nineteenth century in the paintings of Adolph von Menzel and Joseph Mallord William Turner. In the face of the alleged destruction of space through transportation that was noted by contemporaries, these painters, like Claude Monet, sought to pictorialize a temporal perspective. In twentieth-century Modernism, landscape became, if not entirely obsolete, certainly increasingly uncommon. In 1925, Ferdinand Léger formulated the apodictic statement that landscape no longer existed.[14]

The art historian Martin Warnke has looked at "political landscape," a topic that is close to my own theme. He tries to examine visual depictions for their political and social changes. Warnke is intent on showing that an eye for and perception of the landscape need not suffer from political conditions, but can in fact be sharpened by them. In the fine arts we can find various interpretative claims made on landscape, beginning with political order, which correlates with the order of the landscape. Monuments, boundary stones, and roads convey mean-

ings and, as Warnke puts it, "demand certain statements from the landscape." In spite of the overloading of nature in landscape painting, he has argued, the former held its own as "nature *qua* nature." This link of politics and landscape, which points to the political function of landscape and the landscape function of politics, will have a prominent place in the subsequent analysis.[15]

Equally useful in this context are the impulses from cultural geography—especially the work of Cosgrove—for an understanding of landscape as scenery. In the 1990s, the subjective experiential quality of landscape, its interpretative openness, made it more attractive to broad segments of cultural studies. More recently, cultural geography has also begun to see landscape as more than a dialogue and to study also its physical qualities.[16]

In the meantime, history rediscovered landscape as a field of research in the last ten years. The motivations behind this have been varied, ranging from the rediscovery of the region as a historical entity, to Schama's broadly conceived, though not always reliable, general history of the myth of landscape.[17] Most stimulating for the present study were those works that relate the examination of conceptions of landscape to concrete changes in the landscape. Large-scale technological projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have attracted numerous historical analyses. One of the first studies that examined landscape as an experience and its technological change was Wolfgang Schivelbusch's classic work on the railway journey in the nineteenth century, published nearly thirty years ago. Schivelbusch noted that the railroad created "panoramic travel," where the travelers, because of the increased speed, could no longer perceive the foreground of landscape and therefore concentrated on the background or new kinds of travel reading.[18] It was only in the 1990s, and especially in the Alpine countries of Switzerland and Austria, that landscape changes through transportation routes became again a topic of research. All these studies are based on the assumption that the perception of landscape is both technologically constructed and charged with various cultural values. It was precisely during a journey—whether by car or train—that landscape pictures were created that were interpreted as specifically Austrian or specifically Swiss. Wolfgang König has also pointed out that different technological alternatives for the construction of such transportation arteries existed and that their planning was the topic of controversies.[19] Separate landscape histories dealt with the surveying of landscape as a social practice, the reshaping of the Rhine, the landscape history of an industrial region, and landscape changes through oil drilling.[20]

Building on these examples from historical scholarship, the present study is interested in the dual—physical and discursive—construction of landscape in the planning and construction of the autobahnen. The methodological approach by way of both environmental history and the history of technology is intended to do justice to the interweaving of landscape and technology. That is why this study will focus on the treatment of landscape and on the technological means for changing it that were chosen and those that were not. Technology and nature were constructed both topographically and in the imagination of their creators

and consumers. At the same time, I have sought to shed light on those conceptions of landscape that were created or obstructed by these changes or static efforts. These conceptions can be found in the utterances of the actors; in part they become visible only after the conclusion of a construction project as unintended consequences. The multifaceted history of the term "landscape" that I have sketched here provides some sense of the various ideological and social claims that were brought to bear on landscape. Conflict, not consensus, was the hallmark of landscape design.

Yet attention will be given not only to the production side of landscape. Traffic routes were used by motorists who—similar to other processes of consumption—appropriated the groomed landscape, invested it with meaning, and in the process changed it.[21] The effect of landscape in the form of an individual driving experience will also be examined; in this way, landscape will be made usable for environmental history as a term that contemporaries defined in individually different ways.

Notes

1. Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, "Das landschaftliche Auge," in his *Culturstudien aus drei Jahrhunderten*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1859), 57–79.

2. Trepl, Ludwig: "Was ist Landschaft?," *Der Bürger im Staat* 44 (1994): 2–6, 6; Werner Flach, "Landschaft. Die Fundamente der Landschaftsvorstellung," in *Landschaft*, ed. Manfred Smuda (Frankfurt/Main, 1986), 11–28; Gerhard Hard, *Die "Landschaft" der Sprache und die "Landschaft" der Geographen. Semantische und forschungslogische Studien zu einigen zentralen Denkfiguren in der deutschen geographischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1970).

3. Gunter Müller, "Zur Geschichte des Wortes Landschaft," in *"Landschaft" als interdisziplinäres Forschungsproblem. Vorträge und Diskussionen des Kolloquiums am 7./8. November 1975 in Münster*, ed. Alfred Hartlieb von Wallthor and Heinz Quirin (Münster, 1977), 4–12; Rainer Piepmeier, "Landschaft," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Basel and Stuttgart, 1980), vol. 5: cols. 11–28, 12. See also the reference to the interweaving of aesthetic and legal definitions of landscape in Kenneth Olwig, *Landscape, Nature, and the Body Politic: From Britain's Renaissance to America's New World* (Madison, 2002).

4. David E. Nye, "Technologies of Landscape," in Nye, *Technologies*, 3–17, 10, 16.

5. Werner Konold, ed., *Naturlandschaft-Kulturlandschaft. Die Veränderung der Landschaften nach der Nutzbarmachung durch den Menschen* (Landsberg, 1996).

6. Ulrich Troitzsch, "Die technikgeschichtliche Entwicklung der Verkehrsmittel und ihr Einfluß auf die Gestaltung der Kulturlandschaft," *Siedlungsforschung. Archäologie-Geschichte-Geographie* 4 (1986): 127–143; Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zeller, "Introduction: The Landscape of German Environmental History," in *Germany's Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History*, ed. eidem (New Brunswick, 2005), 1–14; Denis E. Cosgrove, "Landscape and *Landschaft*," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute Washington D.C.*, No. 35 (Fall 2004): 57–71.

7. Andreas Dix, "Vorindustrielle Kulturlandschaften. Leitlinien ihrer historischen Entwicklung," in *Die Veränderung der Kulturlandschaft. Nutzungen-Sichtweisen-Planungen*, ed. Günter Bayerl and Torsten Meyer (Münster and New York, 2003), 11–31.

8. For an example of this natural dynamic see Hansjörg Küster, *Geschichte der Landschaft in Mitteleuropa. Von der Eiszeit bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1995), 10, 69–70. Küster evidently regards the concept of landscape as so unproblematic that he does not define it in any detail. On the methodological change in ecology see Michael G. Barbour, "Ecological Fragmentation in the Fifties," in Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 233–255.

9. Müller, "Zur Geschichte," 9.

10. Erich Steingräber, *Zweitausend Jahre europäische Landschaftsmalerei* (Munich, 1985), 73, has identified the painting "St. Peter's Miraculous Fish Catch" (1444) by the Rottweil painter Konrad Wirtz as an intermediate step and the "first reliably identifiable 'landscape portrait' in European painting." The painting is shown in Steingräber, plate 34. The Danish art historian Wamberg, by contrast, dates the transition to the 1420s: Jacob Wamberg, "Abandoning Paradise. The Western Pictorial Paradigm Shift around 1420," in Nye, *Technologies*, 69–86, here 71.

11. Erich Steingräber, "Zur Einführung. Über Natur, Landschaft und Landschaftsmalerei," in Steingräber, *Zweitausend Jahre europäische Landschaftsmalerei*, 9–17, 9.

12. Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture. American Landscape and Painting 1825–1875*, (New York and Oxford, 1995); W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago, 1994): landscape as the "dreamwork of imperialism" (p. 19); Peter Howard, "Painter's Preferred Places," *Journal of Historical Geography* 11 (1985): 138–154. See the attempt to look at landscape paintings from the perspective of art history and environmental history in Bernhard Buderath and Henry Makowski, *Die Natur dem Menschen untertan. Ökologie im Spiegel der Landschaftsmalerei* (Munich, 1986). On Friedrich ibid., 120–130, 171–175; Gottfried Boehm, "Das neue Bild der Natur. Nach dem Ende der Landschaftsmalerei," in Smuda, *Landschaft*, 87–110.

13. Oskar Bätschmann, *Entfernung der Natur. Landschaftsmalerei 1750–1920* (Cologne, 1989), 297. On Friedrich see Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York, 1995), 106.

14. Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 102. On travel by train see the following discussion of Schivelbusch. Fernand Léger, "Sehr aktuell sein" (1925), quoted in Bätschmann, *Entfernung der Natur*, 210.

15. Martin Warnke, *Political Landscape: The Art History of Nature*, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge, Mass, 1995), 145–146. The author erroneously attributes military intentions to the German autobahnen (13). See Chapter 4.

16. Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Totowa, NJ, 1985), 1. See the preface to the new edition of the book and the literature cited there: *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, 2nd ed. (Madison, Wisc., 1997), xi–xxxv. Also, see Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography. A Critical Introduction* (Oxford, 2000); Muir, *Approaches*; Cosgrove, "Landscape and *Landschaft*"; George F. Thompson, ed., *Landscape in America* (Austin/Tex., 1995); George Henderson, "'Landscape is Dead, Long Live Landscape': A Handbook for Sceptics," *Journal of Historical Geography* 24 (1998): 94–100; Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature. North American Landscape from Disney to Exxon Valdez* (Cambridge and Oxford, 1992); Anne Whiston Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted," in Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 91–113. For a further discussion on German-language geography see Thomas Zeller, *Straße, Bahn, Panorama. Verkehrswege und Landschaftsveränderung in Deutschland 1930 bis 1990* (Frankfurt/New York, 2002), 28–35.

17. Norbert Fischer, "Der neue Blick auf die Landschaft," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 36 (1996): 434–442; Sabine Doering-Manteuffel, *Die Eifel: Geschichte einer Landschaft* (Frankfurt and New York, 1995); Schama, *Landscape*. On Schama's problematic characterization of landscape practices under National Socialism, see the following chapter.

18. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise* (Munich, 1977); English translation *The Railway Journey. The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley, 1986); John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor. Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven and London, 1983).

19. Georg Rigele, *Die Wiener Höhenstraße. Autos, Landschaft und Politik in den dreißiger Jahren* (Vienna, 1993); idem, *Die Großglockner-Hochalpenstraße: Zur Geschichte eines österreichischen Monuments* (Vienna, 1998); Wolfgang Kos, ed., *Die Eroberung der Landschaft: Semmering, Rax, Schneeberg. Katalog zur Niederösterreichischen Landesausstellung Schloss Gloggnitz 1992* (Vienna, 1992); idem, *Über den Semmering. Kulturgeschichte einer künstlichen Landschaft* (Vienna, 1984); Walter Zschokke, *Die Straße in der vergessenen Landschaft: Der Sustenpass* (Zurich, 1997); Wolfgang König, *Bahnen und Berge. Verkehrstechnik, Tourismus und Naturschutz in den Schweizer Alpen 1870–1939* (Frankfurt and New York, 2000).

20. David Gugerli, ed., *Vermessene Landschaften. Kulturgeschichte und technische Praxis im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Zurich, 1999); Traude Löbert, *Die Oberrheinkorrektion in Baden. Zur Umweltgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Karlsruhe, 1997); Mark Cioc, *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography* (Seattle and London, 2002); Gerhard Lenz, *Verlusterfahrung Landschaft. Über die Herstellung von Raum und Umwelt im mitteldeutschen Industriegebiet seit der Mitte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt and New York, 1999); Brian Black, *Petrolia: The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom* (Baltimore and London, 2000).

21. John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London and New York, 1995), 187–210; Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London, Thousand Oaks, and Delhi, 1994), 252–278.