Igor Isychenko
PhD (Geographic), independent researcher

A LANDSCAPE AS A FORM OF MEMORY OF EUROPEAN CULTURE

Our ability to conceive a landscape has always been connected with our memory. This latter, understood as cultural memory, has always stayed dependent on various social and economic processes, rather than a constant beyond time and history. Thus, in order to outline some of the ways of reception of a landscape in European culture we must first of all establish historical background.

A good starting point would be to look back at the beginning of the 19th century, when the process of transportation of images of landscapes to cities started; the transportation, that was carried out by such visual media as, most notably, panorama, diorama, photography and, last but not least, film. In this process a landscape was detached from the actual space it occupied for the visual consumption in the form of an image — which resulted in flooding European cities with images of faraway lands. This was itself a continuation of an earlier process, when a landscape was depicted in oil painting, for example. But this continuation had some important differences.

Chateaubriand, a crucial figure to understand the zeitgeist of the early 19th century, noted that the recreation of Athens and Jerusalem, which he had visited during his journey, in one of the dioramas of Paris, where they had been shown some time later, struck him with its actual and complete similarity to the original landscapes remembered by him: 'I could not expect that Jerusalem and Athens will be taken to Paris to prove I am right or wrong [in my writings about these places]' [3, p. 104–105].

Panoramas and dioramas can be understood — apart from being a means of entertainment — as a symbolic vehicle, both representing a certain new way, new regime of seeing and training population through 'optical education' how to get accustomed to a rapidly modernizing urban environment. The quotidian life of a European urban-dweller was being gradually filled with a stream of publicity images, new transportation vehicles, visual noise and dim gaslight of overcrowded streets. To quote Walter Benjamin: 'Announcing an upheaval in the relation of art to technology, panoramas are at the same time an expression of a new attitude toward life. The city dweller … attempts to bring the countryside into town. In the panoramas, the city opens out, becoming landscape' [1, p. 108].

Being a state-of-the-art attempt to create a totally enveloping image, the panorama also leads to an inevitable consequence of fragmentation of its visual field into smaller fragments, ruins of once coherent image, and to be able to see them a spectator must change his or her distance to the image, coming closer (zooming in) to see everything in detail and then going backward (zooming out) to see the general view, scenery as a whole.

It is not a coincidence, however, that the first panorama came only some years after Kant published his 'Critique of Pure Reason' in 1781. This work indicated the beginning of a major shift to the visual in European culture, and it is since then that we can speak about a new stage in the Western perception of the world, an ability to organize it into the form of an image, Bild, or, in other words, a phenomenon: transcendental imagination, Einbildungskraft, replaced reflection as it was manifested in famous 'Cogito, ergo sum' by Descartes, images replaced ideas, and, to quote Mikhail Iampolskii, European subject was from that point on 'to a lesser extent understood as a 'thinking man', being instead more and more often understood as an 'observing man'' [3, p. 104–105].

Romanticism, being at first sight the complete opposition to the ideas introduced into European culture by Kant, was in fact their logical consequence. The obsession of the Romantics with ru-

ins and fragments indicated a transition of the process started by Kant to its next stage, for these fragments and ruins were precisely separate Bilden, images, that had to be grasped by the contemplating — or the observing — subject, in order to survive in the changing environment — and here urbanization was of utmost importance.

We can now turn to the writings of Chateaubriand once again, an important Romantic writer. The most interesting observation is that he systematically applies cultural code to decipher natural phenomena. Upon visiting Vesuvius, for example, he noted: 'I despair of describing the chaos which surrounds me. Picture a basin, a thousand feet in circumference and three hundred feet deep, which slopes downwards in the shape of a funnel. Its margin, or interior wall, is furrowed by the liquid fire which this basin has contained and expelled. The projecting parts of the walls resemble those brick pillars with which the Romans supported their piles of masonry' [2].

After the initial statement about the impossibility of any description, what follows, nonetheless, is an attempt to comprehend a landscape in terms of cultural memory, when fragments of environment are seen through the pattern of Roman architecture.

This said, a question arises, naturally: How are these things connected with our experience in the 21st century? To quote Fredric Jameson: 'The American tourist no longer lets the landscape «be in its being» (…) but takes a snapshot of it, thereby graphically transforming space into its own material image. The concrete activity of looking at a landscape—including, no doubt, the disquieting bewilderment with the activity itself, the anxiety that must arise when human beings, confronting the non-human, wonder what they are doing there and what the point or purpose of such a confrontation might be in the first place — is thus comfortably replaced by the act of taking possession of it and converting it into a form of personal property' [4, p. 11–12].

It is my suggestion that the novel 'Austerlitz' by Winfried George Sebald, published in 2001, a seminal work of literature of the last decades, is an important input into our understanding of all the various ways in which landscapes have been treated during the last two centuries of European history. Even if one glances over the novel, a strong recurrent motif can be easily noticed: the main protagonist of the novel, Jacques Austerlitz, appears to be haunted by visions of landscapes that occupied every square inch of ground before cities, towns and villages were erected by humans, being at the same time obsessed with the attention to the smallest detail of cultural artifacts he encounters — predominantly, but not solely, architectural forms, for he is an art historian with a particular interest in the history of fortification.

Instead of reading the novel as a story, I suggest an attempt should be made to read it as a set of practices of encountering various landscapes and recalling their past, historic forms by means of questioning their space, which has served as a scene for both nature and culture, natural and human histories in their interconnection. For Austerlitz every landscape is not a landscape in a sense of merely a ready image waiting to be seen, but a difficulty, an obstacle for vision that has yet to be absorbed by the beholder. This beholder, however, always undergoes a substantial transformation in the process and, thus, the ways of seeing landscapes become — from the novel's perspective — the ways through which human beings mold and shape their subjectivity, becoming not beholders but co-actors and co-participants of a landscape.

What are, then, the key elements of the proposed practice of experiencing landscapes? Just one lengthy quote — among so many possible examples — that relates to the description of the history of Liverpool Street Station, a railway station in London, can give a good idea of how the cultural is embedded into the natural and gradually arises from it, becoming in doing so aware of its own origin and transient nature: 'I knew that on the site where the station stood marshy meadows had once extended to the city walls, meadows which froze over for months on end in the cold winters of the so-called Little Ice Age, and that Londoners used to strap bone runners under their shoes, skating there as the people of Antwerp skated on the Schelde, sometimes going on until midnight in the flickering light of the bonfires burning here and there on the ice in heavy braziers. Later on, the marshes were progressively drained, elm trees were planted, market gardens, fish ponds, and

white sandy paths were laid out to make a place where the citizens could walk in their leisure time, and soon pavilions and country houses were being built all the way out to Forest Park and Arden. Until the seventeenth century, Austerlitz continued, the priory of the order of St. Mary of Bethlehem stood on the site of the present main station concourse and the Great Eastern Hotel. (…) Soon the site in front of Bishopsgate was nothing but a gray-brown morass, a no-man's-land where not a living soul stirred. The little river Wellbrook, the ditches and ponds, the crakesand snipe and herons, the elms and mulberry trees, Paul Pindar's deer park, the inmates of Bedlam and the starving paupers of Angel Alley, Peter Street, Sweet Apple Court, and Swan Yard had all gone, and gone now too are the millions and millions of people who passed through Broadgate and Liverpool Street stations day in, day out, for an entire century. As for me, said Austerlitz, I felt at this time as if the dead were returning from their exile and filling the twilight around me with their strangely slow but incessant to-ing and fro-ing' [5, p. 128].

Any inhabited space for Austerlitz is still populated with those who once lived there and then passed away and were apparently forgotten, as well as there are still present all the natural landscapes that once covered any territory and then were gone in the process of history. We can see how nature is surpassed by history, but the two remain present for Austerlitz at the same time, both visible and their traces remaining imperishable — one doesn't subdue the other. By listing the river and ponds, herons and elms and mulberry trees alongside with the inmates of Bedlam Austerlitz equates the two histories, with the alternative being the attitude manifested by Kant and then employed by Chateaubriand, when reason is misunderstood and misused mostly as a tool for prescribing environment a certain mode of functioning. To quote Sebald for the last time: 'And whenever I think of the museum in Terezín now, said Austerlitz, I see the framed ground plan of the star-shaped fortifications, color-washed in soft tones of gray-brown for Maria Theresia, her Imperial Highness in Vienna who had commissioned it, and fitting neatly into the folds of the surrounding terrain, the model of a world made by reason and regulated in all conceivable respects' [5, p. 206].

Austerlitz's sight literally functions like a panorama or diorama, where his visions of constantly transforming landscapes stand for the whole of the panoramic image, with the foreground being those ruined parts, fragments and traces through which and only through which a whole can be comprehended. And for him the result of this process of interaction between the new and the existing, between a landscape and memory, can be never known beforehand. This is not even a process, but rather a permanent state of existence, it can be even argued that Austerlitz transgresses his personal memory and history and becomes a landscape. The visions that are constantly haunting him belong less to the realm of imagination but rather are the evidence of our ability to remember in a way that should recall some of the great missed opportunities of European history, bringing to mind memory that does not impose a certain schema or grid, in accordance with which we are forced to classify all that we encounter.

The history of European ways of seeing a landscape of the last two centuries can be symbolically located between two different attitudes: those of Chateaubriand and Austerlitz respectively. As for the latter, in its reveries and visions a landscape becomes a form of memory, collective, yet personal; personal, yet located outside one's personality; it becomes a practical treatment of space, and thus a concrete ethics, not a distanced research process.

The following step could be a construction of a new view on landscapes, where the latter will be no longer passive recipients and retainers of once achieved forms and qualities, but actors and, thus, driving forces behind the mankind's longing for the common good. This suggested interdisciplinary approach can be found already present in the novel 'Austerlitz', where history, archeology, architecture, philosophy and art studies — among other disciplines — are employed in accord to achieve a new seeing of what a landscape is, discovering in the process — and this is perhaps one of the novel's greatest achievements — that there is no such thing as a landscape, but only a never ending interaction between human beings, embedded into their culture, and nature, enveloping them.

References

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Ісиченко І.В. Ландшафт як форма пам'яті Європейської культури.

У статті здійснено спробу розглянути основні способи сприйняття ландшафту європейською культурою періоду після кінця XVIII століття, коли було здійснено важливий поворот у сторону візуального сприйняття, а також основні наслідки трансформацій цього сприйняття у сьогоднішніх історико-культурних умовах. Здійснено аналіз роману «Аустерліц» (2001) В.Г. Зебальда. Запропонована «ландшафтна герменевтика» тексту дозволяє стверджувати, що роман може сприйматися не тільки як наратив, але і як сукупність методів, орієнтованих на створення практичної стратегії повсякденного сприйняття ландшафтів. Основним елементом цієї стратегії, як стверджується, є не пасивне сприйняття ландшафтів, а співучасть у їх становленні, що досягається лише через розуміння скороминущості людської культури та вміння виявити природне в культурному.

Ключові слова: місто, суб'єктивність, пам'ять, ландшафт, історія, сприйняття

Исиченко И.В. Ландшафт как форма памяти Европейской культуры.

В статье предпринята попытка рассмотреть основные способы видения ландшафта европейской культурой начиная с конца XVIII столетия, когда произошел переход к визуальному, равно как и наиболее важные последствия трансформаций этих способов видения в нынешней историко-культурной ситуации. Предпринят анализ романа «Аустерлиц» (2001) В.Г. Зебальда. Предложенная «ландшафтная герменевтика» текста позволяет утверждать, что роман может быть прочитан не только как нарратив, но и как набор методов и установок, ориентированных на выработку практической стратегии повседневного восприятия ландшафтов. Основным элементом этой стратегии, как утверждается, является не пассивное восприятие ландшафта, а со-участие в его становление, достигаемое через осознание преходящности человеческой культуры и умение выявить природное в культурном.

Ключевые слова: город, субъективность, память, ландшафт, история, восприятие

Isychenko I.V. A landscape as a form of memory of European culture.

The main objective of the paper is to outline some of the ways in which Europeans have perceived landscapes since a major shift to the visual perception occurred in the culture of Europe in the late XVIII century, as well as some of the most important consequences from these transformations for the present situation. In order to reach the objective set it was decided to focus on the novel 'Austerlitz' (2001) by W.G. Sebald. A 'landscape hermeneutics' of the text is offered, upon completing which it is concluded that the novel can be understood as a practical strategy for one's quotidian perception of landscapes, both cultural and natural, in such a way being a dialogue with the European tradition of perceiving landscapes. The kind of landscape attitude that is offered in the novel is crucial to any effort of distinguishing between the natural and the cultural and our ability to see the presence of the former in the latter, as well as to any attempts — seldom met, yet needed — to become not the passive recipients or spectators of landscapes but co-actors, participating in their becoming.

Keywords: city, landscape, seeing, history, memory, subjectivity