

LANDSCAPE OF THE PERIPHERY: SPACE OF REALITY AND PERCEPTION*

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Received : 1. 6. 1998

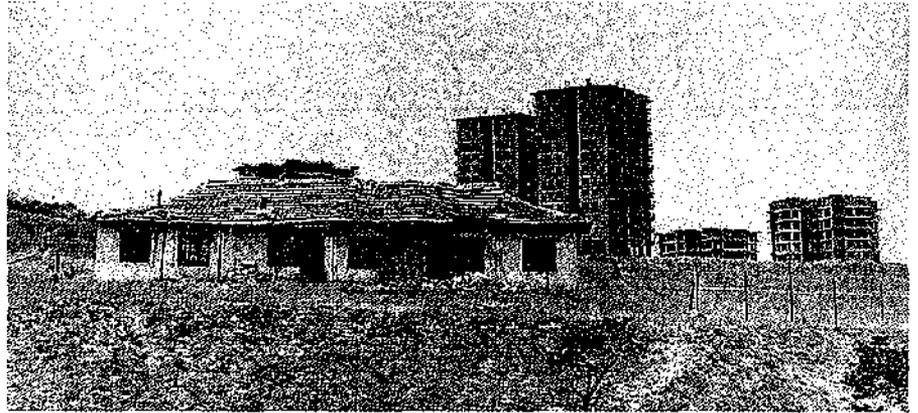
Key Words : Landscape, Aesthetics, Limit, Periphery, 'Ma', Skin, Frontier, Environment, Perception, Identity.

* This paper was presented at an international symposium held at the Bauhaus, Dessau in March 1998, organized to bring together aesthetic/philosophical inquiries into environmental design and restoration issues, largely related to abandoned old industrial sites.

The essay argues for the inherent values of marginal or non-descript geographical situations where meanings may not immediately be legible. The argument implies that semiotic readings into the landscape do not always constitute the value of a site. Site can just be and may not fit into 'design', 'development', 'profit', 'feasibility' criteria.

The project of becoming human necessitated the utilization of memory which developed with the objectification of representations. Thus, humanity not only passed on its experiences through generations, but also 'domesticated' the world by creating the existential domains of time and space. By reflecting its movement and activity upon the earth and within the universe in certain temporal and material orders and thus creating space and time, humanity built for itself a civilizing environment. This creation of time and space made 'confrontations' and 'meetings' with the unknown possible. By defining a place within which representations were transformed into orders, humanity could define an identity for itself. The meeting with the 'other', and confronting the new may be possible only in this way. The temporal and spatial orders constituted the base from which transgression and liberty were possible. The idea of liberty, as well as the capacity to learn, grow from the delicate interplay between object/subject, known/unknown, order/chaos, and self and the other, at the periphery. Both form-making and the definition of identities are articulated and conditioned at the periphery. Thus, the periphery is also the zone of consciousness. Although identity is intensified at the center, there it also becomes blind to itself.

Figure 1. Ankara, destruction of the periphery: The center, as power, attacks the defining peripheries, making any alternative choice for a life style impossible (photograph by author).



Today this delicate and vital zone no longer has a place. The articulations between object/subject, known/unknown, order/chaos, and self/other are being dissolved. Mechanic type of production, action and movement which no longer use representational systems, but depend on digital coding, fragment, dissolve, divide, in repeated units, time and space which had taken humanity hundreds of years to create. This dissolution destroys the idea of a periphery that is a skin alive and breathing and where definitions and confrontations take place. In order to sustain the human quality of aesthetic and ethical values, we have to somehow redeem, gain back, and invest again in this vital zone.

By dissolving, breaking apart, decomposing, and de-constructing, humanity is being able to penetrate everything. The present system of capitalistic growth and victory over nature functions through destruction (Figure 1). In this way, a brutal and barbaric force turns the 'other', the unknown into something without identity.

Our age is called the post-frontier age. This is not a factual but a paradigmatic condition. Thoreau has said, 'The frontiers are not east or west, north or south, but wherever a man fronts a fact'. This statement shows that politics starts at the limit of perception. To front a fact brings with it the apprehension of the 'other'. So far humanity has evolved by accepting otherness as a value to be safeguarded and respected. Rather than seeing itself as the center isolated within a foreign environment, as it does today, humanity has until now acted between nature and freedom, and as the peripheral condition of nature, where exchange and integration between matter and spirit happens. The great capacity for mobility that humanity possesses placed it at the periphery of nature. By transforming the lived moment, which is always an action on the periphery, and between two beings, into an image, into a sign, or into a language, human perception makes time and space, history and continuity, and hence consciousness possible. Human perception, which is able to create meaning only through an aesthetic mechanism, which is form-making, takes place on a living boundary, on the 'in-between' zone, which is called the *ma* in Japanese. Consciousness is nature's peripheral zone. It is a zone in perpetual focus and fluidity. It is the 'in-between', the area of exchange between object and subject. Thus man is the subjectivity in nature and this subjectivity unfolds in his being the periphery to nature. Humankind which is the consciousness of the world, could also be the positive and protective agent in nature.

Can we redeem that zone of apprehension, the marginal territory where varying content come to terms with each other. Can we, in the space where we live, see our world neighboring other possibilities foreign to us? Can we be conscious again that we are inhabiting a place in constant flux, between being and non-being, life and death, self and the other, order and chaos? Can we bring to a level of apprehension, the *unheimlich* inhabited by gods, by those who have not yet

appeared, by the intangible and by those who have been transformed? Can we call into existence again that field of discovery, only where we can grow and become human. Can we pay attention to that which is outside our immediate familiar terrain into which we have assimilated and domesticated everything which was sacred, secret, different. In short, can we re-create, or redeem within the contemporary condition the area of meeting where learning, representation, form-making, where experiment and innovation happen?

Today it is penury and the third world which is seen as the periphery; the periphery is the place for waste disposal, it is the peripherique, the speed-way where you cannot stop, cannot produce, understand, intake or perceive. Can this periphery be revitalized or can we find or define new peripheries? The problem is double; we have to see and understand what is a border, and we have to also redeem and safeguard the border as a vital zone of exchange, of form-making, of creating meaning. Diversity and heterogeneity will be possible if we can continue to create form.

Life is a process through time and space and a constant metamorphosis in which being is constant becoming. It is a nomadic state through conditions, drawing in the peripheries to the center, or going out, expanding, opening up. One's orientation and placement in the world and the intentions and orders of one's process through time/space are reflected in the frame, in the periphery and in the boundaries of the time/space that one has built about oneself in defining one's identity and one's relation to the world. Architecture, the city, landscape, and all forms of art reveal a relationship to the unknown, to what lies beyond, in drawing up specific forms of boundaries, walls, etc. Each passing beyond the border, each trespassing, somehow necessitate a kind of paying back, an apology, a truce.

The attention and effort made to be able to see, to hear, to taste, to understand, in other words to reciprocate to the surrounding, manifest certain gestures, certain positions or dispositions, certain movements of the body and of the being. While each perception constitutes a direct physical, albeit intangible bond with its object, creating a continuous flow of energy, the body and its senses dispose themselves in a certain way, take on certain forms, adapt to their object. The body and the senses thus reciprocate to the 'other', to the unknown. Here begins the first aesthetic form-making with one's whole being, with one's body which becomes malleable as it apprehends the 'other'.

Bending, leaning-over, turning, twisting, posing in stillness, and many other barely visible movements make lines, shapes, articulations to connect to the environment; they are all kinds of a dance, uniting with and defining time and space. In fact, all different geopolitic and economic situations, in all different periods and styles of production, and in different societies also produced their particular time/space forms. Like arts, music, dance, architecture, these were the manifestation of patterns which the senses and the body adopted, the better to relate to the environment. The curves of a dress, the form or clusters of a settlement, the spatial articulation of rooms in a house, the temporal order of music and dance, the compositions of sculpture and painting, and lastly of verbal language, have to do with complex syntheses of form-making and ordering, which are based on patterns of memory, cognition and representation peculiar to a culture. This representational and order giving faculty is a poetic effort to orient oneself in the environment as one derives a meaning from it and as one reflects meaning onto it. It is the primary aesthetic and creative act and the cultural basis from which all art grows and evolves. As this development in form making becomes less and less dependent on the physical/biological relationship between nature and culture, it begins to become merely conceptual and eventually ceases to produce form and meaning.



Figure 2. Reconstruction of a stag's head, showing the intermediate zone between the head and the environment; the peripheral drawing painted on a niche in the east wall of a shrine, Çatalhöyük, Neolithic Town in Anatolia (Mellaart, 1967, 100).

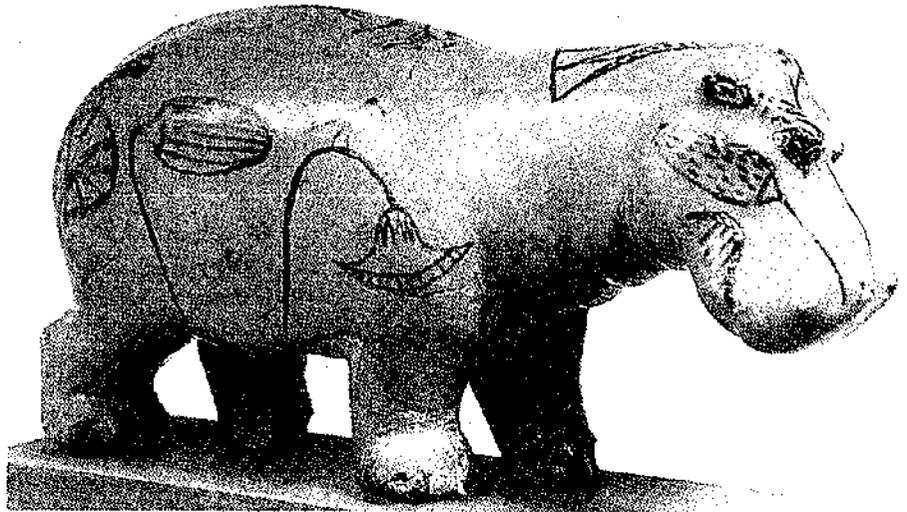


Figure 3. Ancient Egyptian Painting of a hippo, its skin reflecting the Nile: The skin (periphery) becomes the zone of dialogue between the subject and its environment (The Egyptian Museum Catalogue, Cairo, 1987, Figure 82).

Figure 4. Taos, Pueblo: The close relationship of the Pueblo to the surrounding is made possible by its careful attention to topography. All space is, in the Pueblo, inner realm and the building itself becomes the periphery (Rapoport, 1976, 69).



Figure 5. According to Mellaart (1967, 133), this landscape painting depicts in the foreground a town rising in graded terraces, and behind the town an erupting volcano, its sides covered with incandescent volcanic bombs rolling down the slope of the mountain. The twin cones suggest an eruption of Hasan Dağ rising to 3553 metres, visible from Çatal Hüyük. It is interesting to note how the compact pattern of the settlement softens at the borders and allows irregularities and the penetration of the exterior space.



Apprehension becomes a form and form-making by adapting the body and the senses to the environment to receive/perceive and to reciprocate to its stimuli and to the many signs of the world. This form-making is the work of both perceiver and perceived in a way where both are active and where the perceiver is truly attentive to the 'other'. The relationship is held at a most delicate and fragile balance, between outside and inside, self and the 'other'.

Throughout history, up to the end of the industrial age, and until the middle of the twentieth century, the many different ways this delicate relationship was held and was interpreted by various societies can be traced and analyzed in their interpretations and representations of their environment, in their understanding and in the poetics of their orientation within the rest of the world. Accordingly, each type of form-making giving rise to various behavior and movement patterns in the environment, kept the periphery alive and dynamic, as a realm of exchange, and in interaction (Figure 2).

These alternative patterns can be deciphered for all cultures and settlements, and for all forms of art; but they may best be illustrated in architecture. Here the Egyptian, the aborigines, the Mexican pueblo, the Hindu, Tantric Buddha, the medieval Christian and Islamic, the Renaissance, and finally as it evolves out of the latter, in the 19th century Hegelian dialectics of mind and matter and its reflection in industrial culture will be shown as examples. The patterns that we here explain in words or in photographs or drawings can only be simplified schematizations of world views which were reflected in multiple dimensions and experienced in plural aspects and against which, even when they were completely closed systems, their societies had inner mechanisms of trespassing. Trespassing was possible because the periphery was always somehow defined.

These schematizations show the artistry with which societies interacted with the environment, and the value of the periphery as a realm of interchange which was kept alive and dynamic. The unknown or the 'other' could never be totally assimilated.

MODELS OF PERIPHERAL FORMS, RELATIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Boundaries, just like the skin, are formed as give-and-take, in-and-out, concave and convex, inside and outside. The wall is not only a closure, it is a way of relating. The Renaissance city wall or fortifications, the house walls of Pompeii, or the frame of the imagined place separating it from the *terra incognita* as in the Ottoman Miniature, or the wall of a mosque, or the whole city of Rome, related the person to the limit as a place of communication, of offering, of blessing, or of information. In each culture this limit was articulated with the meanings given to the world.

Egypt:

Egyptian culture was the expression of the exchange, and forms of transitions that took place between life (Sun-East) and death (Sundown-West), between cultivable land and non cultivable land. Time cycles were set according to the sun and to the flow of the Nile. The peripheries, silhouettes, borders, crossing patterns were linear, like the Nile (Figure 3).

The Pueblo:

Open and closed are separated in rigid boundaries, the passage between the two is difficult. It is a closed binary system where the preservation of the world as it is very important. The pueblo is built in resemblance to the land form which is sacred. The principle is to repeat natural life and natural forms in social life so as to create a totality and communication (Rapoport, 1969, 68) (Figure 4).

Figure 6. Athens Acropolis III, after 450 BC (Doxiadis, 1972, 35).

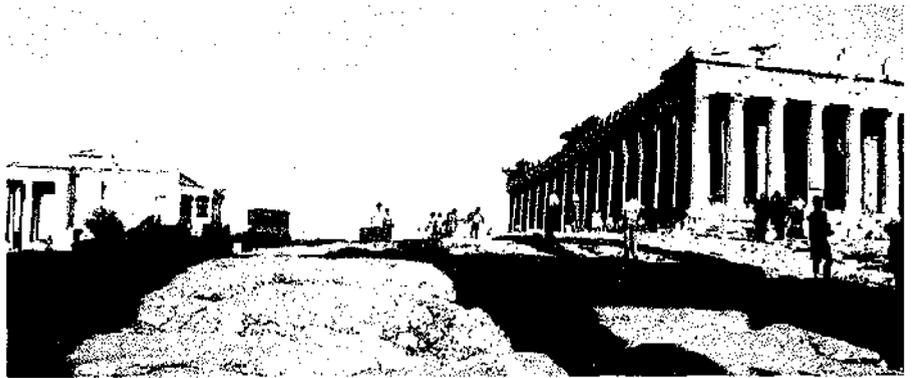
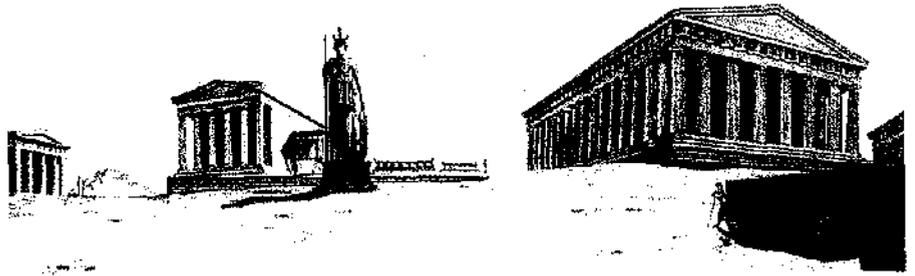


Figure 7. Athens Acropolis from the same spot as in Figure 6 (photograph by author).

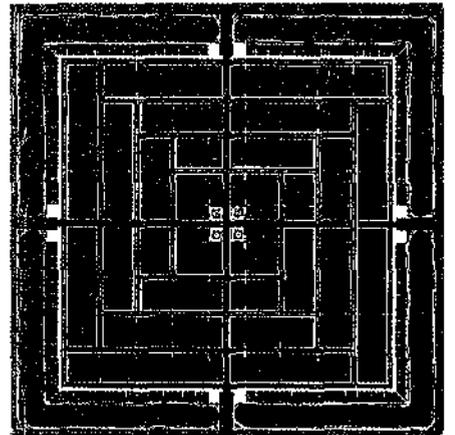
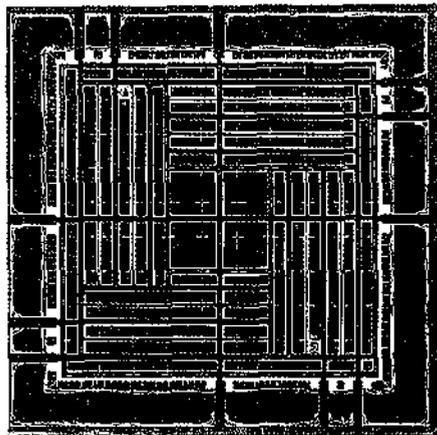
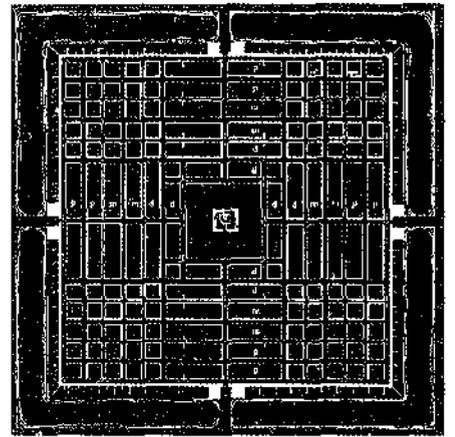
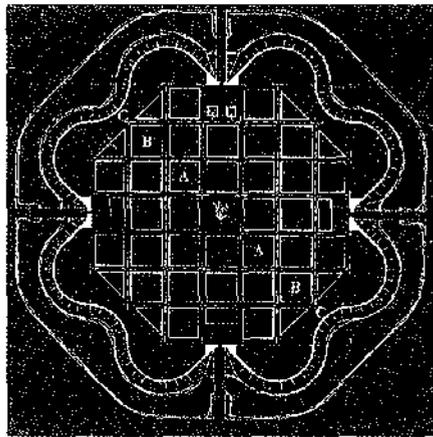


Figure 8a-d. City Plans (Pieper, 1975, 57).

Australian Aborigines:

In the still surviving culture of the Australian Aborigines importance is attached to perceived or non-visible aspects of an environment. The land dreams and owns the people. The society becomes a function of the land; heroes come into a featureless world and convert themselves into features. The great apprehension about the invisible creates the periphery between the visible and the invisible. Thus the periphery is fluid and not geometrical. Mental maps and temporary monuments are just as important as permanent ones (Rapoport, 1975).

The Ancient Greek City:

Although orders and organizations in Greek art, as well as the Greek city seem very symmetrical, each unit was adapted to the environment, in such a way as to give utmost value to each particular identity. A closed field of vision was created where each structure was perceived in succession and each was a complete unity in itself. According to axes of movement or views, all structures related to each other in an organic manner. The forces of nature, in the symbols of Gods, were brought into the acropolis, so that man and god communicated. In a way, the periphery was around each separate unit. At every new object there was a pause to perceive and to apprehend. This attention to each identity without reducing it to a part of the whole is actually rooted in the paratactic order of earlier Greek culture - as we see in Homeric verse where each episode, each thing stands out by itself and is not subordinated in a hierarchic arrangement (Doxiadis, 1972) (Figures 6 and 7).

The Mandala and Hindu Cities:

In Indian cosmology, the esoteric knowledge of universal order which evolved through cycles manifests itself on two levels, as appearance and also shapeless unity: permanent change and permanent repetition. The Mandala is the graphic reproduction of the universe to be mediated as image or place or urban arrangement. The idea of the city as a micro-cosmos relates man to central powers and to the cardinal directions of energy. The shape of the Mandala defining borders protects the lived spaces from evil forces (Pieper, 1975) (Figures 8a-d).

The Tantric Buddhist:

Here the different levels of being are in smooth transition, almost creating a spiral form. There is vital attention to the body and control of the spirit through the body. From concrete narrative and imagery to higher sophisticated levels of mental activity the process is circular. The higher mental states do not need imagery. The universe is seen as a system of groupings. The wisdom of the universe is to be decoded through numbers and geometry. As an example in the Borobudur temple the square of the base which relates to the earth becomes eventually circular as one rises towards the heavens. The visit becomes a ceremony by circumambulating and reliving the cycles of Buddha's life.

Medieval:

In all medieval systems the geometry relates to symbols of power and of energy of the universe. The square and circle interact revealing the relation of the earth and of the heavens. The center of the universe is the sacred religious spot where god chose to have an event take place. Above all circumambulation is designed as the type of movement to penetrate a place and to pay respect. It symbolizes turning with and re-enacting the movement of the heavens and of time, thus re-creating sacred time and space on earth. The spiral which is a movement that evolves but never repeats itself, which is multi dimensional, was also important in Islamic iconography. It could be traced in the way the narrative was composed in pictorial expressions or in layouts of architectural organizations and planning. Although seen schematically, it seems to offer no escape, with its rigid looking boundaries, the artist broke this order intentionally by introducing irregularities or mistakes to the order (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Assisi (photograph by author).

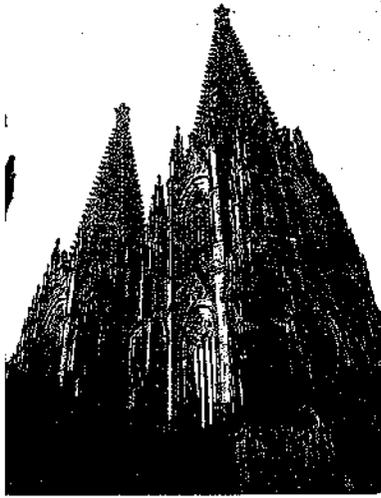


Figure 10. Milan Cathedral (photograph by author).

Figure 11. Ghiberti, Detail from the doors of the Baptistry, Florence: Space is ordered according to a movement that tends to manipulate the future. The boundary is under attack (photograph by author).



The Gothic is a structure where vertical elements are spanned with huge openings. As the successor to the medieval it is where the circular, spiral and closed system is beginning to break loose (Figure 10).

The Renaissance:

The first evidences of secular thinking emerge when the classical order loses its repetitious, circumambulating, trance-like sacred character. The movement with the perspective view is linear; it is fast and towards the horizon. The far distance holds a promise for man who may now wonder out. The perspective patterning of the universe gives every existence its exact place in a hierarchy with the promise of light in the future and a fast straight movement cutting through time and space. If one point perspective creates a fast movement and penetrates the boundary, the baroque world-view with three point and two point perspectives makes even a greater penetration of the periphery possible (Figure 11). The boundary is thus pierced in more places. The capitalist system of increasing assimilation, never leaving anything out, starts with the linear perspective of reaching out beyond the horizon, to nothing, to non-being.

It gives the possibility to move across space and time without any contact or any real goal. It is a system to manipulate territories without domesticating or claiming them.

As we approach the industrial age, we see that patterns begin to become more open and the peripheries less defined. The sharp contrast between inside and outside is softened. The late Gothic is a structure where vertical elements are spanned with huge openings. *Light and dark mingle. This and the other world begin to mix, and eventually the other is annihilated.* The ramparts of the city are removed as we see in the city of Kierkegaard. There begins an increasing assimilation of the 'outside', of the 'other' and expansion. The periphery becomes obsolete.

In the industrial system the movement is vertical. The city is planned accordingly. Painting shows us that the artist sees the canvas as a flatbed upon which images come forward but do not move in depth. There is no depth, the surface is flat and we go to an indistinct height from which the world will seem a puppet's land. We have a sense of complete manipulation over all visible reality. This increases infinitely with digital technologies where everything becomes visible. There are no more nomads roaming over the earth and discovering *Terra Nova*, no more peripheries.

All otherness is assimilated and gravity which held us close to the earth is annihilated by the speed with which we move. This extreme speed inhibits travel, visits, and encounters, we are constantly zapping.

Today is that the distinctions of territory, center, periphery may be used only as political defferents but do not have environmental significance. What is far enough and out of sight is kept so because it is needed as a zone for waste (Figure 1). The Hegelian dialectic of mind and matter played against each other as antithesis have ended in a way Hegel was not anticipating at all. The capitalist mode of production had first separated the hand from the heart and mind and that replaced the hand with the tool. Not spirit, as Hegel assumed, but matter reigns.

CONCLUDING: ON ETHICS

If knowledge is freedom, is transgression, we always need to have a frontier where we can meet the 'other'. The speed and expansion made possible by industry and technology and by the capitalist market has pushed this frontier to outer space. Yet, without any visible frontiers, despite the extinction of peripheries, this system has given rise to its extreme opposite within its core. In fact, its growth, speed and expansion is possible by the creation and at the expense of an opposite extreme.

This extreme opposite is the world of penury with its constant mobility in search of means, its loss of boundaries, its exiles, immigrations, meaningless growth and lack of definition and lack of information. The eradication of peripheries at this extreme may even be more radical, because it seeks forgetfulness. While new technologies make memory obsolete by storing all information and all the past digitally, penury at the other extreme does away with memory because it is a painful reality. Thus, differences of past, present and future and the possibility of experience varying in time become limited.

On the other hand, exchange amongst differences can be once again brought into effect by creating new awareness of otherness as quality and by becoming aware of other existing peripheries: these could be within the social field by creating contact with the poor, the old, the disables; they could be within the cultural field by creating contact through art and architecture with people of different cultures, backgrounds, *etc.*; these could be activated within nature and within the ecological field by approaching nature with new apprehension.

The artist and the aesthetic approach will be the most effective in facilitating the creation of these new zones of exchange. We have to start with the question, Where and from whom and how can we now learn in new ways, create new communications and new approaches to perception?

SINIR PEYZAJLARI

ÖZET

Alındı : 1. 6. 1998
Anahtar Sözcükler: Sınır, Çevre, Algı, Kimlik, İletişim, Estetik.

Bu yazı ilkin 1998 Mart ayında Almanya'da yapılan bir sempozyum için hazırlanmıştır. Dessau Bauhaus'da uluslararası çevre sempozyumunda sunulan yazı, çevresel değerlere yalnızca geliştirilmiş ve 'tasarı' kriterlerine uyan semiotik okumalar açısından bakmanın yanlış olduğunu savunmakta, sınırsal olanın değerlerini ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır.

Bauhaus Sempozyumu, özellikle Doğu Almanya'da yüzyıl başlarında gelişmiş olan endüstrilerin terkedilmiş alanlarının kullanımı ve yeniden tasarımı konusunda düşünceler ve değerlendirmeler geliştirmek üzere düzenlenmiştir.

Bu deneme, sınırsal olanın, fiziksel ve bilinçsel sınırların insanın gelişmesinde, bilinçlenmesinde ve özgürleşmesindeki rolünü irdelemektedir. Sınırsal olan, ya da ben ve öteki arasında tariflenen ayırım aynı zamanda farklılıkların yaşayabilmesini mümkün kılan, farklılıkların birbirleri ile ilişki kurabilecekleri, karşılımların olabileceği, alış verişin cereyan ettiği bir alan, böylece bir iletişim yeridir.

Teknoloji ve kapitalist pazar geliştirdiği ve sınırsız şekilde artan hız ve yayılma ile farklılıklar ve bunları tarifleyen ayırımları yok ederek sonsuz çoğalan bir tekrar dünyası yaratmıştır. Bugüne dek, farklı bazı kültürlerin sınırları nasıl eklemlediğinden örnekler vererek bu ayırımların nasıl biçim ve bilinç yaratarak çevre ve kişi arasındaki ilişkiyi yönlendirdiğini ele alan bu metin, günümüzde, sosyal, kültürel ve doğal (ekolojik) olanla yeniden, farklı kapsamda ilişkiler oluşturarak yenilenme imkanları önermektedir.

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