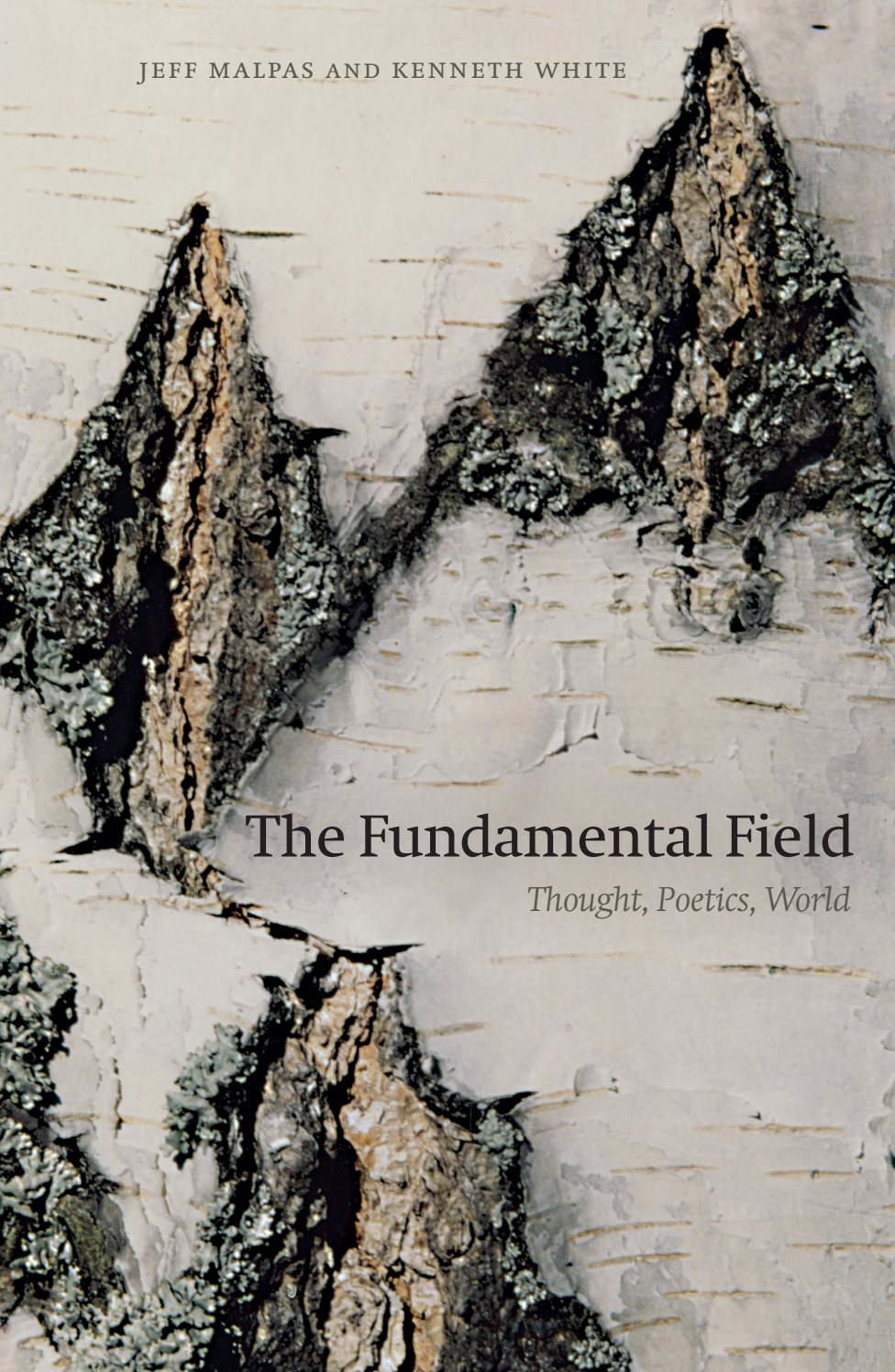
JEFF MALPAS AND KENNETH WHITE



The Fundamental Field

Thought, Poetics, World

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Preface

This is a short book, but a highly concentrated one, and rather complex.

From the organisational and structural point of view, it is more than the juxtaposition of a philosopher and a poet, with Malpas (the philosopher) writing on White (the poet), and vice versa.

It consists of two approaches, each with its references (some shared, some different) to a field common to them both, which both have explored in their own way over the years, and concerning which they attempt here not only to make a summing-up, but to reach a culminating point.

A risk is taken in calling this field 'the fundamental field'. A risky enterprise in a cultural context where the plural takes precedence over the singular, and where the indefinite article is preferred to the definite one.

The risk is increased further by extending the notion of 'field' to that of 'world', which, in normal usage, has all kinds of socio-political and historico-cultural implications.

This 'normal' world has for long been under sharp criticism.

'The world is too much with us', says Wordsworth in one of his poems, meaning here by 'world', the general socio-psycho-political ambiance of tedious obligation and deep-seated frustration that Freud was to present and analyse in *Civilisation and Its Discontents.* In his book, *Hyperion* ('the man with hyper-demands'), the poet Hölderlin intensified the context further by saying to his protagonist 'What you want is a world', intending by the term something other than a naïve New World or a remake of the Ancient World.

In the wake of Hölderlin, the philosopher Heidegger (an important reference for both Malpas and White) in his essays speaks of 'the worlding of a world' (*das Welten der Welt*) and makes statements such as 'The world never is, it is always a becoming' (*Welt ist nie, sondern weltet*).

The authors of this book have had all this cogitation in mind for years.

It was by chance (objective chance?) that they came together, with Jeff Malpas (resident in Australia) hearing on a radio programme on the ABC (the Australian Broadcasting Corporation) an interview with Kenneth White recorded at his residence in Brittany. Thereafter Malpas got in touch with White, they exchanged books and texts, and a meeting was arranged between them at White's place on the Breton coast.

This book is the result of their conversations, and ensuing developments.

To come back on its title. Contemporary history is there to show that unless we get at something fundamental (a question of founding and grounding), the world is going to be more and more beset by simplistic fundamentalisms of various types, but all destructive of live thought and anything like a complete existence.

The book has three parts. The first two take the form of essays: the first is by White and the second by Malpas. They embody different styles and modes of approach, but what they come to and work within is indeed the one field of thought and engagement. The book is completed by the third part, a set of philosophical poems by White.

JM
KW

The question of place is a difficult one. Place is a thing, certainly, but it also has power. The power of place, close to chaos and emptiness, memorable in itself, precedes all things.

Aristotle, *Physics*

The poetic nature of thought is still unseen. Where it does appear, it will long seem like a kind of place-no-place of semipoetic understanding.

Heidegger, *From the Experience of Thinking*

Intelligibility is infinite. It takes place in an intellect actively engaged in attempting to comprehend totality.

Duns Scotus, *Treatise on the First Principle*

I. Talking Topology in the Finisterras

Kenneth White

Prologue

I've conceived this text as the extension and expansion of a series of dialogues between Jeff Malpas and myself when he came to visit me at my place on the Breton coast in February 2012. Malpas had already sent me four of his books: *Place and Experience*; *Heidegger's Topology*; *The Place of Landscape*; *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*. I'd sent him some of mine. It was obvious from the outset that we had a great deal in common.

Even a superficial comparison of the works of Malpas and myself would reveal similarities of preoccupation, conceptualisation, and even vocabulary. The trilogical subtitle of Malpas's book *Heidegger's Topology*, 'Being, Place, World', has a close equivalent in the title of a succinct presentation I did of my own theory-practice, geopoetics, *Place, Culture, World*. In chapter 4 of *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, entitled 'Ground, Unity, and Limit', we have this: 'Ground is not a common term in the contemporary philosophical vocabulary'. Anyone the least acquainted with my own bibliography will know just how frequent the term is in my work: *On Scottish Ground*, *Grounding a World* – 'founding and grounding' is one of my leitmotivs.[1] Not to speak of the term 'topology' itself, on which both of us have rung changes, from a cosmological space-time model to a mode

1 'Grounding a World' was the title of my personal contribution to a symposium on my work at the University of St Andrews, 10–11 October 2003, the entire proceedings of which were published as Gavin Bowd, Charles Forsdick and Norman Bissell (eds), *Grounding a World: Essays on the Work of Kenneth White* (Glasgow: Alba, 2005).

of local apprehension and comprehension via various interpretations and manipulations of that enigmatic combination: *topos* plus *logos*.

That said, the aim of this essay will in no way be systematic comparison. The intention is to delineate the contours and render sensible the substance of a general field that we both approach.

Before going into the matter of the dialogues and their development, given the themes that will be under review, it's maybe appropriate to begin by evoking the physical context in which our dialogical meeting took place.

The other day I picked out from my shelves a book I hadn't read for years, an anthology of texts on aesthetics,[2] and was surprised to come across one by William Sharp written after a visit to Brittany roughly a century ago.[3] In it he evokes 'those wild Breton coasts of the Tréguier headland', with the 'grey, muttering waste' of the sea, and 'the cold and barren drift of the tides'. Little did I realise, when I must have read these phrases at the age of fourteen on a cliff overlooking the north end of the village of Fairlie, in Ayrshire, Scotland (my favourite spot for reading that kind of book), that years later I would be living in that self-same area. There's maybe an existential logic to it, in addition to other logics.

Sharp's evocation of an atmospherical greyness, meteorological and marine, reminds me of Hegel's reference to a philosophical greyness: 'When it comes to trying to say what the world should be, philosophy always comes too late. As

2 Richard Aldington (ed.), *The Religion of Beauty: Selections from the Aesthetes* (London: Heinemann, 1950).

3 William Sharp, 'The Two Voices', in Aldington (ed.), *The Religion of Beauty*, pp. 304–6.

world-thinking, it turns up only when reality has completed its process of formation. It paints grey in a greyness.'[4]

I want to go further into that greyness.

First of all, I can't see it as grim. It's a relief from all the noisy glare that fills our world, and it has its own aesthetics. One of my favourite modern paintings, by Paul Klee, is entitled *The Grey Man and the Coast*. Thus, greyness can be the preparation for another kind of light. On the very day after his vision of the Breton coast as a grey waste, Sharp saw it as 'a tossing wilderness of blue and white', interpreting its light as 'the moving dazzle of exultant life', experiencing 'tides of happiness'.

Finally, if what is habitually called philosophy does always arrive on the scene too late, after activist history and techno-terrorism have wreaked havoc, taking the form of commentary or analysis, the most interesting philosophers of those late times have tried to get at a thinking earlier than 'philosophy'. And if at times, nowadays, it may seem too late for anything deeply satisfying actually to take place, and 'worldify', the kind of activity some of us are engaged in can, at the very least, be seen on the general historical level as a last stand. But it can still stimulate, maybe even inspire, individual thinking and living. And, who knows, it may also be seen, without undue optimism, as providing the sub-stance for a new beginning – a new organisation, a new *organon*.

As to the organisation of this essay, I've written it having in mind Hesiod's *Works and Days.*

4 See the Preface to Hegel's *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1821) – translated as *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Day 1: Ploughing Through the Problematics

Consider, if you will, this first section, concerning problematics (and semantics) as preliminary labour, primary propaedeutics.

The basic ground is place and space, place-space, space-place.

In recent years, it has become a central thematics, with a host of subsidiary themes, resulting in a mass of documentation and publication by specialists of this or that discipline, representatives of this or that locality.

Given this context, some kind of panoramic critical enquiry is called for, if only to clear the decks for further advance, further opening.

The best location to demonstrate this is the collection of essays Malpas edited under the title *The Place of Landscape*. These essays bring in elements from philosophy, aesthetics, geography, ethnology, cinematography, sociology and religion.

What I want to do in this first section is lay out thoroughly the preliminary discussions between Malpas and myself concerning the general attitudes to space throughout history, as well as the 'issues' raised by the question of space and place on the contemporary scene, with, always in view, the contours of a new field and always bearing in mind that a field is defined as much by what one leaves out as by what one puts in.

The Politics of Place

That place, outside obvious *polis*, can have a political connotation is certain. In Swedish, the very word *landskap*, now applied to the various provinces (Dalarna, Gotland, Ängermanland, Västerbotten . . .) once referred to a political region, in fact a small kingdom, with its own *thing* (government). For the incidence of politics on landscape, we need look no further than toponymy: from Edinburgh's New Town, which has 'Britain' written all over it (George Street, Rose Street, Thistle Street . . .), to what were known up to recently as the Queen Charlotte Islands. As to the use of landscape for political purposes, History has made all kinds of variations on this theme, and the literature is voluminous. Among recent studies, there are, for example, Jean Gottman's *La Politique des États et leur géographie*,[5] Kenneth Robert Olwig's *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic*,[6] Denis Cosgrove's *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*,[7] to which can be added many a historico-sociological essay concerning this or that locality at this or that point in time. These go from evocations of enclosures and clearances to the analysis (psychological, social, statistical) of contemporary holidays (erstwhile 'holy days') commandeered by industrial tourism, the successor of an earlier Grand Tour, part integral of an aristocratic set-up, meant for 'seeing the world', but reduced in most cases to a fast look at a cathedral or a countryside, long bouts of drunkenness, and short-time visits to brothels.

5 Jean Gottman, *La Politique des États et leur géographie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1952).

6 Kenneth Robert Olwig, *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

7 Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

All of these studies have their validity and interest. It's only when they start to draw general conclusions that some of the neo-Marxist, post-colonial positionings can lead up blind alleys ending in crude reductionism, if not sheer ineptitude.

At least four of the sixteen essays contained in the overview volume *The Place of Landscape* are concerned with this political aspect of the question: 'This Green Unpleasant Land – Landscape and Contemporary Britain', by Michel Rosenthal; 'The Lie of the Land – Reflections on Irish Nature and Landscape', by Nigel Everett; 'Landscapes of Class in Contemporary Chinese Film', by Stephanie Hemelryk Donald; and 'The Political Meaning of Landscape', by Bernard Debarbieux.

Since it's Debarbieux's essay that opens the largest conceptual field, it's on it I'll concentrate here.

Debarbieux begins in the context of the historical studies I evoked above, exemplifying, first, 'the construction of a national territory and a corresponding national society through the manipulation of appropriate symbology',[8] and, second, the domination over a landscape by this or that individual, group or institution. As an example of the first, he examines the case of Switzerland: the construction of a Helvetian national identity via the Alpine landscape and an Alpine myth concerning the harmony, freedom and egalitarianism of a mountain community, which he debunks. For the second, he refers to the eighteenth-century English landscape gardening of Lancelot Brown, involving the enclosure of large tracts of private property, and the

8 Bernard Debarbieux, 'The Political Meaning of Landscape (Through the Lens of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*)', in Jeff Malpas (ed.), *The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), p. 137.

construction of a space exclusive of the forms developed by a working population of peasants or their picturesque exploitation.

Beyond the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century schemas of the exploitation and instrumentalisation of landscape, leading to generalised alienation (the vocabulary here is of course clearly Marxist), Debarbieux looks to recent 'political collectivities endowed with new competences', such as Scotland after devolution, seeing there 'a revival of objectives and modalities', but finding in that revivalism no more than another type of alienation. Still looking for a real revivification, he looks to 'new political and democratic practices' in the nation-states, thinking of the post-1982 decentralisation process in France by which more autonomy was given to *communes*, *départements* and *régions*, and thereafter to other levels of organisation such as *pays* and *communautés de communes*. I see him in that context trying to convince himself that, via 'a political project with new territorial basis', a real possibility of dis-alienation exists and that the social sciences are on the verge of a new paradigm.[9] I can sympathise with his hopes, but hardly concur with the perspectives.

What Debarbieux is left with is the notion of 'landscape action' as it comes across in the thinking of Hannah Arendt.[10] 'Action' here is conceived as, I quote Debarbieux, 'the source of the definition of the political identity of the subject and the modality through which men and women in society define what they have in common and what they

9 Ibid., pp. 142, 146, 146, 141, for the respective quotations.

10 See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

place at the heart of the public space'.[11] To say the least, it is specious. As Debarbieux himself says, it would require 'a more delicate formulation'.[12]

So, let's move on.

The Humanity of Place

In 'our' civilisation, in 'our' culture (the inverted commas indicate already a definite distance on my part), the accent on the human and on humanity is ponderously, pervasively, monotonously, stiflingly present. It's probably the biggest blockage there is on the way to anything like a larger conception of things.

'Before man could begin to appreciate landscape, or rather, the elements that constitute a landscape, he had to put his mark on it. Only when he has planted his orchards and fruit trees and gardens does it become for him a source of delight for the senses', writes Enzo Carli.[13] If a statement like this can have some validity within a strictly historical (over-humanised) context, it is by no means true of 'man' in general. One need only think of Celtic culture, of Far-Eastern culture, and of certain aboriginal nomadic cultures.[14]

'This is how we should think of landscapes', writes John B. Jackson,[15] 'not merely how they look, how they conform

11 Debarbieux, 'The Political Meaning of Landscape', p. 132.

12 Ibid., p. 146. For this question of formulation, see my essay 'Place and Formulation', in Jeff Malpas (ed.), *The Intelligence of Place: Topographies and Poetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 221–52.

13 Enzo Carli, *The Landscape in Art* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), p. 17, quoted in Malpas, *The Place of Landscape*, p. 7.

14 The documentation here is huge, if long neglected and scattered. References and developments will be found throughout my work, be it in essay, travel narrative or poem.

15 In an essay 'Learning About Landscapes' in a volume of essays entitled

to an aesthetic ideal, but how they satisfy elementary needs: the need for sharing some of those sensory experiences in a familiar place: popular songs, popular dishes, a special kind of weather found nowhere else, a special kind of sport or game, played only here in this spot. These things remind us that we belong – or used to belong – to a specific place: a country, a town, a neighborhood. A landscape should establish bonds between people, the bond of language, manners, of the same kind of work and leisure.'

This is not only intellectually and culturally limited, it is pathetically domestic. Furthermore, to say, as Jackson apparently does,[16] that 'the American conservation movement has its origins in a frontiersman mythology and rhetoric that posited an idealized conception of forest and woodland tied to an idealized conception of the relation between the human and the natural', is not only, I submit, patently untrue, it borders on the nonsensical. Frontiersmanship and idealisation are mutually incompatible, antinomic. And the founder of the American conservation movement, John Muir, expressly said that it was high time for America to leave the frontier attitude and mentality, looking to conservation as the basis for a whole re-creation of humanity.[17]

The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), pp. 16–17, quoted by Malpas in *The Place of Landscape*, p. 15.

16 Quoted by Malpas in *The Place of Landscape*, pp. 14–15.

17 For an American discourse at once larger and more precise than that of Jackson, see Walt Whitman, not only in the poems, but in essays and notes such as 'The Prairies and Great Plains', 'America's Characteristic Landscape', 'The Savage Saguenay'; see also Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1910), as well as essays such as 'Katahdin'. For John Muir, see his book of 1901, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1901), as well, of course, as *The Mountains of California* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin

It's with something like relief that I turn back to Hannah Arendt, because with her the argumentation rises to another, more general level. Commenting on her book *The Human Condition*, Bernard Debarbieux says that 'skeptical of any abstract statement concerning *human nature*, she strives to define *the human condition* as it is conditioned by our existence on Earth and our material environment'.[18] So far, so good, I can go with that – but in fact, on a closer reading of her text, it is evident that Arendt has no real sense of place at all. Her position is all too humanised. She is less concerned with Earth and material environment than she is with human interaction and human artefact in a closed human world: '. . . the term "public" signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us [. . .]. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artefact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together."[19]

I have myself no abstract, essentialist conception of 'human nature'. But I am sceptical of any discourse concerning '*the* human condition'. That there is conditioning (rather than 'being') of human existence, there is no doubt: conditioning socio-historical, educational, etc. But once

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Co., 1917), *The Yosemite* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2018 [1912]), etc. All of this thinking is continued in the essays and studies of Carl Sauer, such as 'The Barrens of Kentucky', 'Environment and Culture During the Last Glaciation', 'Seashore – Primitive Home of Man?' For a convenient anthology of Sauer's work, see *Land and Life*, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

18 Debarbieux, 'The Political Meaning of Landscape', p. 131.

19 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 52.

you've accepted the notion of conditioning, you must be at least open to the notion of de-conditioning.

It's this idea which is totally absent from even the most interesting and far-reaching attempts to enlarge human perception and experience, from, say, Friedrich Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Humanity* of 1793/4,[20] based on Kantian principles, to Eric Dardel's humanistic geography, based on phenomenology, as presented in his *L'Homme et la terre* of 1952.[21]

Beyond 'humanity', there is, for some minds, a dimension vaguely referred to as 'spirituality'.

It's this I propose to go into now.

The Spirit of Place

In recent and contemporary Western civilisation, there has been and there still is a loose usage of the old term *genius loci*, its derivative 'spirit of place' being vaguely attached to the notion of 'the sacred'.

Here at random are some examples.

Advising Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington, on the landscaping of an eighteenth-century garden, Alexander Pope[22] writes:

> *Consult the genius of the place in all;*
> *That tells the waters or to rise, or fall;*
> *[. . .]*

20 My source is volume 10 of the *Sämtliche Werke* (Berlin: Knaur Verlag, 1906).

21 Eric Dardel, *L'homme et la terre* (Paris: Editions du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 1990).

22 Alexander Pope, *The Poetical Works* (London: Forgotten Books – Classic Reprint, 2016).

Calls in the country, catches opening glades,
Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades,
Now breaks, or now directs, th'intending lines;
Paints as you plant, and, as you work, designs.

A theoretician of architecture entitles *Genius Loci*[23] a study on what he calls 'phenomenology in architecture', that is, largely, the use of elemental vernacular forms.

A convention held in Quebec City, 2008, organised by ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) was entitled *Spirit of Place*. In its intentions and declarations, it called for 'the safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage', the promotion of 'the spirit of places, namely their living, social and spiritual nature', the defence of 'local communities that are the custodians of these values' and who uphold 'the physical, visual and natural aspects as well as social and spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge, [. . .] the physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place', all of this in the interest of 'sustainable and social development throughout [. . .] today's globalized world'.[24] This is well meaning, but, to my mind, a bit of a hotch-potch. And when, to 'spirit of place' as 'a relational concept' with 'a plural and dynamic character', the adepts of this conception and approach add, for 'enchantment, emotion and mystery', the arts in the form of 'folk tales, stories, memories, beliefs', one can't help feeling that pucks, fairies, elves, ghosts, not

23 See Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980).

24 Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place, adopted by the ICOMOS 16th General Assembly and International Scientific Symposium, Québec, Canada, 4 October 2008. Available at <http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-646-2.pdf> (accessed 11 November 2020). Emphasis added in quotation below.

forgetting green men and hobbits, are in the offing, waiting in the wings of this sociological-psychological theatre. What I retain from it, if anything, is the open-door conclusion: 'We encourage discussion and debates in order to *develop a new conceptual vocabulary* that will take into account the ontological changes of the spirit of place', while being convinced that this kind of development takes more than discussions and debates.

It's here that we can make a transition to yet one more stage (with, as always, a certain amount of connection and overlapping in this critical run-up).

The Poetry of Place

If symposia on 'the spirit of place' are frequent,[25] anthologies of literature and poetry abound. I'll refer here only to one: the book put out by Richard Aldington in 1944, entitled, precisely, *The Spirit of Place*.[26] The reason I select this anthology for scrutiny is that it is devoted to the work of one of the very few English writers of the twentieth century who have really and deeply interested me: D. H. Lawrence. I can't read him much today, because I find his style of writing all too repetitive and hyper-nervously staccatic (even in those books of his I prefer: *Twilight in Italy*,

25 I'm thinking among others of those run in the United States and Japan by James and Roberta Swan, as consigned in books such as James A. Swan (ed.), *The Power of Place* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1995) and James A. Swan and Roberta Swan (eds), *Dialogues with the Living Earth* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1996).

26 Richard Aldington (ed.), *The Spirit of Place* (London: Heinemann, 1944). The passages of Lawrence quoted are to be found, respectively, on p. 95 (excerpt from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*) and pp. 119–20 (excerpt from the introduction to *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*).

Sea and Sardinia, *Etruscan Places*, *Mornings in Mexico*), but he has intuitions, fulgurations, perceptions galore, and a lot of it centres on a sensation of place.

Here he is on England:

> England, my England! But which is *my* England? The stately homes of England make good photographs, and create the illusion of a connection with the Elizabethans. The handsome old halls are there, from the days of Good Queen Anne and Tom Jones. But smuts fall and blacken on the drab stucco, that has long ceased to be golden. And one by one, like the stately homes, they were abandoned. Now they are being pulled down. As for the cottages of England – there they are – great plasterings of brick dwellings on the hopeless countryside.

Here he is on Sicily:

> Lovely, lovely Sicily, the dawn-place, Europe's dawn, with Odysseus pushing his ship out of the shadows into the blue. Whatever had died for me, Sicily had then not died: dawn-lovely Sicily and the Ionian sea.

But to come now to conceptual and cultural issues. In his Introduction, Aldington has this:

> These passages of *The Spirit of Place* have been chosen because I believe they illustrate a side of Lawrence which is most accessible to English writers, and most likely to delight them. This love of the non-human world both for its own sake and in its relations with human beings is not peculiar to English literature, but is a strong and persistent feature, as everyone recognizes. French literature always tends to become absorbed in purely human and social interests; with the Italians of the Renaissance 'Nature' was a theme for very formal treatment, while with the modern Italians it is a theme for rhetorical treatment and is made to share the hysteria of the protagonists. In Spain, Azorin is a

> great exception – for him the visible world exists and he is almost perfect in his evocation of the unique moment of the Spirit of Place. But for him the spirit of time past is as important – *Una Hora d'Espagna* – and there is always the human figure, always the Latin tendency to conventional formal abstraction. The world of the English is wider and more irregular. They are picture-thinkers, but the picture moves.

There's a certain amount of truth in this, but only a certain amount, and it's middle-zone truth.

If it can be said with some degree of validity that the English mentality is more 'nature-friendly' than rationalistic France, and that English literature has more nature-writing than the literature of France, which does indeed tend (at least in the middle-zone) to 'human and social interests', it has to be immediately noted that it's by study and analysis of the human that one can move beyond conventional conceptions of individual and social humanity. The only man to attempt this on the British scene was David Hume, and he had a hard time of it, feeling intellectually at home only in France. It was to certain 'old Frenchmen', such as Montaigne, and to the seventeenth-century 'moralists', such as La Rochefoucauld, that Nietzsche looked at a significant stage in his trajectory away and out of 'the all too human'. It could also be said, in passing, that when Aldington says of Azorin that for him 'the visible world exists', he is quoting, verbatim, but apparently unknowingly, or forgetfully, a French writer, Théophile Gautier. It also looks as if he knew nothing at all of, for example, Victor Hugo on the Channel Islands, or Jean Giono in Provence.

But to come back across the Channel.

That the 'poetry of place' is a feature of English literature, there is no doubt. Again, anthologies abound. With some

rare but notable exceptions (Hopkins, Doughty, Powys, but they belong in another category, of which more later), English poetry of place is, to say the least, homely. It began with the praise of country houses on landed property, as seen with Pope, and it tends to stay in that context. Even Wordsworth, who, at his best, spreads a wider sail (though I hardly share his moralisation of the cosmos), can come perilously close to the established Housman–Betjeman line. By 'Housman', I mean of course A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*,[27] that cycle of sixty-three poems, with its evocations of 'blue remembered hills', 'the broom [. . .] on Wenlock Edge' and 'the land of lost content', and its message – life is short, love is fleeting, death is round the corner – that was carried by so many English soldiers into the trenches of the 1914–18 War, in a spirit of nostalgia, compensation and resignation. As to Betjeman, John, whose *Collected Poems* appeared in London, introduced by the Earl of Birkenhead, in 1958,[28] they were presented by the magazine *Time and Tide* as follows: 'Mr Betjeman is *genius loci*, the fond topographer at our elbow to reveal to us undreamt-of visual and social joys. Here is a proud, passionate, pugnacious, poetical Englishman, writing from the heart about his own country, her land, her buildings, her people.'[29]

A few examples will suffice.

Here's a piece on Harrow-on-the-Hill:

When melancholy Autumn comes to Wembley
And electric trains are lighted after tea

27 A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896).

28 John Betjeman, *Collected Poems* (London: John Murray, 1958).

29 Eulogy presented, along with others, on the sleeve of Betjeman, *Collected Poems*.

The poplars near the Stadium are trembly
With their tap and tap and whispering to me.

Here's one on Essex:

And as I turn the colour-plates
Edwardian Essex opens wide,
Mirrored in ponds and seen through gates
Sweet eventful countryside.

Like streams the little by-roads run
Through oats and barley round a hill
To where blue willows catch the sun
By some white weather-boarded mill . . .

And here, as finale, is one on Cornwall:

We used to picnic where the thrift
Grew deep and tufted to the edge
We saw the yellow foam-flakes drift
In trembling sponges on the ledge . . .

If I've evoked here in the first instance, as the most widespread references,[30] Housman and Betjeman, I'm aware that we could extend the list of poets and the geography to, say, Crabbe on the Sussex coast, Cowper on the banks of the Ouse, Barnes in Dorsetshire, and so on.

But with this English 'poetry of place' we never go beyond locality as localism. I've seen it written that 'modern man in search of a soul[31] could seek sustenance at this source.

30 In one of the *Titanic* films (the 1953 version directed by Jean Negulesco and starring Clifton Webb and Barbara Stanwyck), *A Shropshire Lad* is read from just before the ship sinks.

31 The reference of course is to Carl Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1933).

Whatever 'soul' may be satisfied with, I think 'modern man' needs and can absorb much more.

Place as *Heimat*

It's because modern man has been exposed there to more plights and perils than England has known, but also because thinking has gone on there in a larger field, with sharper concepts, that it's to a certain Europe I now turn. There, the equivalent of the English 'poetry of place' is a preoccupation with *Heimat*, the German word now in common usage in this context.

I may say as a preamble that I can't look without deep emotion at photographs in one of the *Heimat* books[32] in my library: photographs of the Harz mountains, the Lüneburger Heide, a Black Forest house in the snow, the Schwäbische Alb, early spring on the Bodensee, the cliffs at Rügen, Goethe's garden house in Weimar, Bacharach on the Rhine, the port of Danzig, the *Wanderdünen* (moving dunes) on the East Prussian coast . . . . It was when travelling in Poland and in that *Grenzgebiet* (limit region) between East Prussia and western Russia that I began looking into the local problematics more conceptually and making initial contacts. A hefty collective volume entitled *The Face of My Homeland*,[33] published in 1996, brings together texts in German, alongside texts translated into German from Polish, Russian and Lithuanian. What the book sets out to do is gather traces of a 'sunken world', referred to

32 Karl Robert Langewiesche, *Die schöne Heimat* (Königstein im Taunus: Karl Robert Langewiesche Verlag, 1955).

33 Wilfried Lipscher and Kazimierz Brakoniecki (eds), *Meiner Heimat Gesicht. Ostpreussen im Spiegel der Literatur* (Munich: Herbig Verlag, 1996).

metaphorically as 'the Atlantis of the North', and it does so with a sense of urgency, a determined cogency and a will to coherence. If it contains texts, marked by nostalgia and pathos, of a homecoming after long years of exodus and exile ('Who will give us back our dreams?', 'Only the storks remain'), if it talks of *Selbstfindung* (self-discovery), it goes beyond any facile identity ideology and its frequent concomitant, narrow nationalism. In its search for *traces*, it goes back into Latin texts, for example, those of Copernicus on the movement of celestial bodies with their ground-breaking *Secunda Petitio* ('The centre of the earth is not the centre of the world . . . '), goes from there to the essays of Kant on Enlightenment ('Enlightenment is man's exit from his self-inflicted infantility'), Hamann on 'The Origin of Language', and thereafter to the literary writings of such as Arno Holz, Hermann Sudermann, Max Fürst, Ferdinand Gregorovius, with their evocations of the Baltic coast, the lakes and woods of Ermland (now, in Polish, Warmia) and Masuren (Mazury), as well as towns such as Tilsit (Tylza), Wilma (Wilno), Allenstein (Olsztyn), not forgetting Kant's place, the old grey town of Königsberg.

What I see in this whole enterprise, which involves landscape, history and culture, is the attempt, while insisting on the significance of place, the necessity of emplacement, to get beyond anything like regional thematics, small-minded localism, couthy homeliness. If the heart is present, any dwelling in sentimentality is out, the accent is on a place of the mind (*geistige Heimat*), and if there is a search for identity, it is 'new identity', that is, it takes place outside the search for 'roots'. Over against anything like identity ideology, it is universal value that is put forward. Close to this in my reading is the feeling out, the thinking out, the outreaching to a new sense of Europe, outside the mental

categories of the nation-state, and beyond what perhaps can be seen as the intermediary stages of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. More abstractly still, but no less essential (on the contrary), there is a dialectic of limitedness and non-limitation. To live within limits is a necessity, to live perpetually within opinionated precincts is necrogenous. Hence the need to cross over limits and boundaries – with the increasing awareness thereby of the need for 'surroundings' (*Umwelt*). Lastly, but not leastly, a word turns up in these pages on which I'd like to insist and give more emphasis to: *Anfangsgründe*, grounds for a new beginning.

I've concentrated here on developments in that high north-eastern territory, but propositions and projects going more or less in a similar direction can be detected all over Europe. In 1990, I took part in a German (English-German) symposium on 'Regionalism, Nationality and Internationality in Contemporary Poetry'.[34] It did not go far, but it was at least on a potentially interesting line. German contributions included 'The Landscape Poetry of Jürgen Becker' and 'Postwar Berlin, a Playground, a Grey Place' by Uwe Kolbe. As for English language poetry, the contributions went, in a predictable kind of way, from a study on the poetry of Edward Thomas, followed by others on Geoffrey Hill ('A Mercia of the Mind'), 'Tony Harrison and the Poetry of Leeds', and 'Myth, Language and Place in Seamus Heaney's Poetry'. My own contribution was entitled: 'The Atlantic Seaboard: Poetic Topology of the European West'.

It all comes down to the question of topology.

34 See Lothar Fietz, Paul Hoffmann and Hans-Werner Ludwig (eds), *Regionalität, Nationalität, Internationalität in der zeitgenössischen Lyrik* (Tübingen: Attempto Verlag, 1992).

But before going further into that question, let me just try to sum up the contents of the first day's discussion and try to work out an abstract conclusion.

The first question that arose in my mind as, after general overview, I went meticulously through the contents of the book *The Place of Landscape*, texts gathered together by Malpas, adding material from my own store of reference as I went along, was this: how pluralistic and relativistic must you be if you want to really open up a new field? I can appreciate the statements made by Malpas in his Introduction: that 'landscape opens out on to a multiplicity of different genres', that the problem to hand cannot be 'the sole preserve of any one field of discipline', that 'only a plurality of answers and approaches can begin to do justice to the iridescent and often opaque character of landscape and place'.[35]

But at the same time, I'd say that an excess of relativism and pluralism can confuse the issue, drown the fish, which is why I felt the need to do some trenchant criticism of certain positions. What I'm suggesting is that the time has come to move out from pluridisciplinary and interdisciplinary activity, via a transdisciplinary activity into a new activity altogether.

This is not to deny the value of the various disciplines as they exist today. But it is, perhaps, to give them a density and an edge.[36]

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35 Malpas, *The Place of Landscape*, p. xii.

36 This notion of 'edge' has been with me for a very long time. Witness the titles of some of my books: *On the Atlantic Edge*, *Aux limites*, *Limites et Marges*. For years, in universities, I did lectures and courses entitled 'At the Limits of Literature'. And when I started up the *Cahiers de Géopoétique*, I invited aboard people I saw situated at the edge of their disciplines, be these geography, biology, psychology, or

We hear much also of 'collective intelligence'. Hence a multiplicity of colloquies. I have no objection to, indeed I have a liking for, that verb behind the substantive colloquium: *colloquere*, to 'talk together'. I think simply that this activity is most enjoyable, and productive of the best results, when it takes place between few interlocutors, indeed perhaps at best two, rather than in any kind of 'round table' debate, which becomes more of a rhetorical spectacle or, at a lower level still, of a verbal show. And I go one further: rather than to anything like Collective Intelligence, I look to the Singular Intelligence – with the following provisos and definitions. The Singular Intelligence is neither 'personal' nor 'subjective'; it is suprapersonal and evolves outside the subjective–objective framework. Then, the Singular Intelligence does not exist 'on its own'. It is, in fact, and in act, a singular-plural, because the searching singular intelligence will have ranged over a large area of experience, knowledge and cogitation (this is one aspect of what I call 'intellectual nomadism').

Malpas, my interlocutor of these 'works and days', is a generous, perspicacious and efficient symposiumist. That he is eminent among the band of researchers who have gone furthest into the problematics of place is obvious enough and now generally recognised. What is maybe less obvious is that he is one of the smaller band who have tried to get the most *out of it*.

If, in the Introduction to the book he edited, *The Place of Landscape*, he makes collaborative, oecumenical statements

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whatever. That is why I agree wholeheartedly, whole-mindedly, with what Edward Casey says in his essay on 'The Edge(s) of Landscape' in *The Place of Landscape*. I just don't see any intellectual interest in positing 'liminology' as an 'emergent discipline'. Too many -logies spoil the logos.

such as those I've quoted, we hear him also talking later in his contribution of 'an enlarged analysis', 'a larger conceptual domain', a 'conceptual topography'.

It's in this topographical–topological field that Malpas and I essentially meet; this is the ultimate ground we move on.

In our apprehension of it, we have sometimes used the same references, sometimes different ones, his move often philosophic, mine more often poetic, both of us being able to move also in the other's domain.

What I submit now, for the continuance of these investigations, is that to get at the fundamental topology now at issue, beyond all the topics that can be piled up in the interim, it is absolutely necessary to move out, to be aware, in all its implications, of a radical crisis, indeed a catastrophe, both in philosophy and in poetry.

Which brings us to Day 2.

III. Three Philosophical Poems

Kenneth White

The Etna Letters

In memoriam Empedocles

1.

An offspring of *la bella Sicilia*
born at Agrigent

in the beginning

I spoke Greek
with an Italian accent.

2.

Ah, Agrigent
on my triple-shored island
around it
the tumultuous Ionian Sea
that gouges out its spacious gulfs
isle where you hear
the mountain's murmur
where your eyes see its flames and flashes
it's there
I made my first discoveries.

3.

When I'd finished my studies
at the suprematist schools
of Parmenides and Pythagoras