

## **Being and Landscape:**

### **An Ontological Inquiry into a Japanese Rural Community**

Abstract:

This essay aims to reflect on the idea of landscape and our relationship with it by taking the Japanese notion of *furusato* (native place) in its ontological dimension. Grounded on Heidegger's 'phenomenology of Being' and 'ontology', it will be developed a phenomenological understanding of fieldwork experience in a Japanese rural community in order to rethink both the *furusato* and the 'Being-landscape' relation. As a consequence, we will be concerned not with how people *speaking about* landscape, but with how the landscape *speaks through* people. What will be brought to light are the landscape's moral and relational dimensions: namely, (i) the responsibility towards both our communities and future generations and (ii) a more-than-physical understanding of landscape that alerts us to our belonging to a common world comprised of relationships and tasks.

Keywords: Anthropology of Landscape; *Furusato*; Ethics; Phenomenology; Heidegger

## §1. Introduction

The landscape, as a theme of inquiry and reflection, is found within a mesh-work of definitions and theoretical approaches. Its recurring presence both in academic and popular thinking reveals its significance for the human condition, namely, in the development of a sense of belonging (Relph 1976; Tuan 1974). In Japanese society, the rural landscape in particular is embedded with an affective dimension evoked through concepts like *satoyama* 里山, *genfūkei* 原風景 or *furusato* 故郷. During the summer vacations and the New Year, thousands of Japanese travel to their hometowns in a generalized movement that largely surpasses the dimension of what we witness, for example, in Europe – these journeys are called *satogaeri* 里帰り (return to the village): the journey to one's *furusato* (native place) is considered as a *homecoming*, a return to one's own origins (Berque 1997, 178–79). The idea of *furusato* is also evoked throughout several dimensions of Japanese society and culture: in the popular 1914 song *Furusato*; the 1983 Seijirō Koyama's movie with the same name; in *Enka* ballads (Yano 2010, 168–78); in television broadcasts, advertisement and travel companies (Robertson 1998, 119–21); or through the concept of *furusatozukuri* (native place-making) (Robertson 1994, cap. 1). The affection for the landscape (*fūkei* 風景), manifested through several concepts, ideas and areas of social life is in line with a long tradition of praise for the Japanese landscape, but most particularly with Shiga Shigetaka's 1894 famous book *Nihon Fūkeiron*/Treatise on Japanese Landscape, a work with nationalistic overtones written to promote the uniqueness of Japanese geography (Gavin 2010). A tradition that, as 'landscape theory' (*fūkeiron*), is said to characterize a genre of documentary filmmaking emerging in Japan at the end of 1960's, where landscapes acquire a more central role in the telling of a story (Furuhata 2007).

When these ramifications, idealizations, nostalgia and appeal for the landscape in Japan are dealt with by scholars, they fit broadly into two different approaches: (i) within the field of ecological and environmental sustainability studies, where it is addressed through the concept of '*satoyama*' and valued as a sustainable model of interaction between humans and their environments (Berglund et al. 2014; Iwata et al. 2010; Takeuchi et al. 2003); and (ii) within the social sciences, where the landscape is addressed mainly through the idea of *furusato* (hometown, native place) and turned into an object of a certain historical objectivism as an 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm 1983): an ideal, encouraged by the government and instrumentalized by the media,

travel companies and the like, in order to promote nostalgic and nationalistic feelings in Japanese people or turn it into a commodity (Ben-Ari 1992; Creighton 1997; Ivy 1995, cap. 4, 103–108; Robertson 1988, 1998; Vlastos 1998, pt. 2).

Our main contention is directed at this second approach. By focusing on the historical contexts or “origins” of the bearers or authors of a certain tradition, idea or text, the ‘invention of tradition’ and its theoretical derivatives assume they are uncovering their real meaning of tradition. However, the problem is not they are wrong about the facts that support their critiques on a certain idea or tradition, but that they are mistaken, so to speak, regarding the *nature* of tradition itself, i.e., of what comes to us from the past. A tradition, an idea or a text stands the test of time not because of its inertia, but because it is continuously readapted, embraced and cultivated anew throughout time (Gadamer 1975, 293; see also Connerton 1989). Thus, what a tradition, idea or text means is not understood by explaining or debunking its historical or particular contexts, but by engaging with what it *says*, its ‘subject matter’<sup>1</sup>.

In short, by setting aside the critical nature in the second approach, this essay aims to illustrate how the *furusato* and its ‘subject matter’ can lead towards different considerations regarding our common understanding of landscape, the places we inhabit and our relationship with them. Nevertheless, when fieldwork is involved, reassessing these issues from a different perspective entails taking a different stance regarding our encounters with people as well: what we could call a phenomenological-oriented account of human affairs. Accordingly, and grounded on Heidegger’s ‘phenomenology of Being’, as well as in his account of ‘ontology’, in *Being and Time*, this essay will attempt to bring to light a phenomenological understanding of some fieldwork experiences in Kazemura<sup>2</sup>, a Japanese rural community, in order to rethink the landscape ontologically: i.e., not by taking it as an object, describing what people have to say *about* their village, but by disclosing how an understanding of landscape reveals itself out of their practical undertakings in their *being-in-the-word*.

Informing the ‘cultural dialogue’ that lies in this essay’s background, is a view of ethnography that takes its encounters with people in the world as it takes its encounters with authors or philosophers on paper: not simply by repeating, describing

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed account on these issues see Marshall Sahlins’ direct critique of the ‘invention of tradition’ (Sahlins 1999) and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s account on the nature of tradition (Gadamer 1975, 289–302).

<sup>2</sup> This is a fictional name. Any resemblance with an actual place is a coincidence.

or systematizing what one hears or learns, but by using a particular experience, thought or turn of phrase as an insight to reflect anew on a certain issue – or, as Ingold (2014, 291–92) puts it “to improve our perceptual, moral and intellectual faculties for the critical tasks that lie ahead”<sup>3</sup>.

## §2. On ‘Being’ and ‘ontology’

In Heidegger’s *Being and Time* lies a substantial transformation of (i) the understanding our most primordial mode of being in the world and (ii) the nature of our investigations into human affairs.

For the German philosopher, human beings are better characterized by the notion of Dasein (Being-there). Dasein is distinguished from all other entities by the fact that in its mode of being, its Being is an issue for it. (1962, 32/12). Dasein’s main characteristic, then, is to be concerned with the possibilities of its own Being. Additionally, Dasein’s Being is always-already thrown up in the world before he starts to make meanings out of it – as Heidegger writes, “Dasein is already ahead of itself” (1962, 236). In other words, being-ahead-of-itself is a condition of Dasein that directs him towards his own (future) possibilities of being. This structure of Being is comprised in the notion of ‘Care’ (*Sorge*), not as a reflexive state (worry or concern), but ontologically, as *being towards* (1962, 237).

This account of Being is a consequence of Heidegger’s need to reformulate language to convey his message, but the fundamental idea behind it, although with substantially different outcomes, can be traced back to Husserl’s ‘intentionality’: the idea that ‘to be conscious, is to be conscious of something’; there is always something *towards* which we *are* in the world. One of the main differences between Heidegger and Husserl is that the former, although never using such a term, builds his own idea of intentionality by refusing to focus on consciousness itself, but on a level prior to our being-conscious-of-consciousness (for a comparison between both thinkers see Crowell 2005). The major consequence of this reformulation is that, for Heidegger, the most fundamental way we cope with things around us is not as objects of perception, but

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<sup>3</sup> A stance close to what has been called an “ethnographically based philosophical anthropology” (Wentzer e Mattingly 2018): an effort to engage in a more humane dialogue within Anthropology and to expand the particularism of our reflections into a more humanistic endeavor.

rather as instrumental items of our most ordinary practical activities – it is, fundamentally, a praxis-oriented account of Being. Thus, Being is not some entity or essence embedded within a physical subject, but a continuous action of intentional “circumspection” (*umsicht*) constitutive of our own *thrownness* in the world. Charles Guignon (2005, 397) summarizes it: “As ex-sisting (from *ex-sistere*, standing outside itself) *Dasein* is always-already ‘out there’, engaged in undertakings, directed toward its realization”.

Heidegger’s phenomenological account of Being seems to be in harmony with our most primordial ways of engaging with the world. In fact, when the world is first disclosed to us, we are already coping with it, practically absorbed in our undertakings. We are always-already articulating an awareness of the world, or a part of it, by understanding ourselves through what we do, the context where we are doing it and the purposes of doing it. The posture of becoming subjects in opposition to a world of objects is a secondary attitude we take towards what surrounds us – it is only when things do not proceed as expected, that we inquire the world as something open for explanation and observation.

However, embracing this interpretation of Being means taking it not only as a theoretical tool, but as a practical orientation of how to make sense of what we experience during fieldwork – this takes us back to the initial claim for a phenomenological-oriented account of human affairs. If we take the primordial mode of being human as *being always-already engaged in the world* before casting judgments on it, it is crucial to reformulate our ways of looking, inquiring and interpreting concrete human activities. It is right in the Introduction of *Being and Time* (1962, sec. 3 and 4) that we find some remarks (grounded on the previous account of Being) of how to reformulate our investigations on human affairs into an *ontological inquiry*.

In Heidegger’s view, there is a fundamental distinction between two kinds of questions that we can do regarding entities in the world: *ontological* questions, about the modes of being of entities; and *ontic* questions, about the proprieties and characteristics of entities. What is ontological can never be discovered through an ontic investigation, no matter how much one describes the characteristics of an object.

If we attempt the same exercise with the Japanese landscape, we could answer ontically by referring to its distinctive visual, aesthetic or physical features or, as we saw before, taking it in its ideological, historical or sociological particularities. However, what these answers accomplish fails to give us an understanding of *why* the landscape

comes to occupy such a central place within Japanese society and how its *mode of being* is articulated in the practical engagements of its inhabitants. In an ontological answer, on the other hand, we should try to disclose the meanings that the landscape articulates and how it manifests itself in people's being-in-the-world.

In Watsuji Tetsurō and Augustin Berque, we find two distinct ontological answers concerning Japanese landscape. Watsuji builds his answer philosophically, starting from a critique of Heidegger's lack of focus on the 'collective' (spatiality) in *Being and Time*. His notion of *fūdo*<sup>4</sup> 風土 tried to grasp the relational moment when humans meet landscape and understand themselves from within that relation – as he defined it: “*fūdo* is the structural moment of human existence” (Watsuji 1979, 3). From that “structural moment”, when humans “step out into” (*sotoni deru* 外に出る) the landscape, Watsuji tells us, specific and material expressions take form, such as culinary forms, construction types and so on (1979, 17–19). On the other hand, Berque addresses and builds directly on Watsuji's *fūdo* and present us some shared cultural values that are commonly associated with the landscape in Japanese myths, literature, poetry and religious beliefs. For example, according to Berque (1997, 120–28, 171–86), the ‘word’ *sato* (village; part of the word *furū-sato*) carries a strong maternal component associated with the idea of uterus, making, along with *yama* (mountain) a polarity easily discernible: *sato*, ‘village’, a bas-relief zone and the place of the maternal, human and ordinary; *yama*, ‘mountain’, an high relief zone and the place of the paternal, sacred and extraordinary..

Both authors do sketch an answer to an ontological question about landscape. However, due to the nature of their inquiries (a philosophical and a cultural study), they do it by leaving out real human beings in real, practical engagements with the places they live in. In the specific case of Watsuji this shortcoming is more obvious. His *fūdo* strikes us with a deep ontological understanding of the relation between humans and landscape and can be taken as a (helpful) starting point for our inquiry. Nevertheless, and although it alerts us to “that structural moment” when humans “step out into” the landscape and understand themselves for the first time, it ends up in deterministic-like discussions on different types of climate and their effect on human behavior. In the

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<sup>4</sup> *Fūdo*, instead of ‘climate’ (as translated by Bownas in Watsuji 1988), which does not properly convey Watsuji's intentions, is translated by Berque with the French word ‘*milieu*’ (Berque 1997, 2004).

remainder of this essay, on the contrary, by developing this inquiry from real people in a real community, our ontological answer will try to surpass the shortcomings in Watsuji's.

### §3. The relational landscape

During the first days in Kazemura, I realized that the idea of *furusato* would turn out to be an important trigger for my inquiries on the relation between humans and the places they inhabit. My goal was never to explore the idea of *furusato* itself during fieldwork, but because I was working on the theme of landscape it was only natural that this word would come up somewhere along the path. However, the way that its meaning was unveiled, led me to reformulate my pre-established aims and to rethink what can be encompassed by the notion of 'landscape'. In one of my first dialogs with the village's *kachō*, I was presented with a fresh view on what *furusato* meant to him. He said: "When I think about *furusato* I imagine a temporal continuum, a line. I am here – he said pointing somewhere between a scale he made with his hands –, *furusato* is this link formed between the ancestors and the next generations. The position that, in the present, both I and the community occupy, assigns us with a kind of responsibility in maintaining that same connection between these two poles: the ancestors and the next generations."

The simple reference to the ancestors as a landscape's element could lead us to remarks of religious or ritual nature (see Smith 1974), but for the particular goals of this essay, I would like to take a slightly different look at it. The majority of human cultures and societies exhibit a clear relationship between religion and the ancestors, but if we try to avoid the most obvious answers, it is easy to realize that *prior to* a religious expression, the deep respect for the ancestors constitutes a certain moral understanding of what it means to be human: namely, to be in a relation, i.e., in a "practice of concern", with what the ancestors left us (Traphagan 2004). And in the case of the *furusato*, this intergenerational responsibility gets less religious if we consider that it is also directed to the next generations – it could be thought of closer to a moral understanding of how to orient ourselves in the world. It encapsulates an attentive and humble consideration for the wisdom that has been left by the previous generations who lived in a particular place. It is not just the simple idea of saying that the ancestors still live there somehow, but the bare acknowledgment that, just like we owe our parents a great deal for who we

are today, we own the previous generations the possibility of living in the places we currently live. If we consider the places we inhabit from this perspective, we can think of the *human beings as the bare bones that support the landscape* (or the *furusato*). Hence, the landscape is the temporal link maintained by human beings at every moment; and, as a link, it morally implies other human beings who *lived, live* or *will live* in a particular place.

The experience of life in Kazemura embodied, to a great extent, what the *furusato* seems only to imply. In fact, on several occasions, I could not avoid but to notice a constant reinforcement of bonds between people: when they met by accident and exchanged impressions about the work they were doing in the village; when they greeted me and each other with words regarding the effort the other was putting into his undertakings; or even when, in communitarian tasks organized by groups, one group would promptly help the other when their own task was done. This dynamic allowed me to think the whole that is the landscape not so much through the physical space itself, but through a certain sense of caring for a common world; through human beings and their relationships with others and with the places where they live in.

In short, both the *kachō*'s words about the *furusato* and the sense of cooperation that permeated the village led me to reconsider the premises behind my inquiry and to focus, not in what the human being *thinks* about his relationship with the landscape, but in the human himself *as* a landscape inhabitant. Would it be possible to free the idea of landscape solely from its physical and visual dimensions and to approach it from its relational dimension: namely, as that against which they first understand themselves (as Watsuji's *fūdo* tries to convey) and their common world? And within that relational dimension, consider it, not only through the connection between generations (like the *furusato*), but also from the relations where, in the present, people are inevitably embedded? These questions bring us back to Heidegger.

In section §2 there was a crucial idea we started to postulate and that we can summarize now: that *theoretical intentionality* is always preceded by *practical intentionality*. One thing is to describe the world and its components as objects of perception; another one, entirely different, is to bring that same world to light through our own acquaintance with it and the ways it discloses itself to us in our practical activities (i.e., as *ready-to-hand*) before we philosophize about it. In the first case, we tend to separate ourselves from the world, atomize it into entities independent from the activities that give them meaning and construct theoretical propositions and judgments

about them. In the second case, on the contrary, we do not look at things and build an analysis of them, but grasp their existential weight from within a totality of activities and tasks they are already a part of. Phenomenologically speaking, Being is always-already articulating an understanding of some part of the world as he moves through it, engaging in relational and practical undertakings. In a certain sense, then, we can say that the above account on the *furusato* ends up meeting this phenomenology of Being halfway, for the understanding of landscape enclosed within the *furusato* comes forth already *as* the practical, relational and moral undertakings of human beings. Thus, the landscape is first manifested and articulated in its inhabitants' *being-in-the-world*, and not as a physical substrate or object of perception.

When arguing critically about the sensitive act, Merleau-Ponty (1962, 185–86) makes a similar claim: “every empiricist thesis is reversed: the state of consciousness becomes the consciousness of a state, [...] the world becomes the correlative of thought about the world”. As an effort to undo this ‘step ahead’ in our philosophical analysis, he reverses the way we normally conceive the sensitive act. In order for something to be felt by me, he argues, “I must find the attitude which *will* provide it with the means of becoming determinate, of showing up [as something concrete]”. In this way, “I can see blue because I am sensitive to colors; so if I wanted to render precisely the perceptual experience, I ought to say that *one* perceives in me, and not that I perceive” (1962, 191–93). Starting our inquiries from the premise ‘I feel/see’ means, then, that we are already one step ahead in the act of perception. In order for us to *feel/see*, we had already developed a certain attitude of attunement with the world: the world is already perceived in us, before we take it as an empirical entity.

Nevertheless, when we look into some classics of landscape literature, we almost invariably find this ‘step ahead’: in the performative act of walking through landscape (Wylie 2005); through arguments of landscape as language (Spirn 1998) and text (Barnes e Duncan 1992); as the object of iconographic studies (Daniels e Cosgrove 1988); or constituted as a relation between spatial conceptions of *foreground* vs. *background* (Hirsch e O’Hanlon 1995) – in these works the authors start, right from the beginning, to objectify our relations with the landscape making it an detached entity. They start their inquiry already too late, in the ‘I/we/they perceive’ stage.

It should be clear by now, then, that reassessing the landscape ontologically means taking the practical engagements of daily life as the starting point of the inquiry: *before the human being perceives the landscape, one perceives it in him* – it speaks

through him in his practical engagements with it. And the ways it is articulated through his daily tasks and casual speech, tell us more about the primordial relation with it than an utterance about it. In short, in our next step we should not focus on what people eventually say regarding their village and its landscape, but from their daily actions and relations in their *being-in-the-world*.

#### **§4. *Jon'nobi*: work ethics**

The major difference to be noted within Kazemura, in contrast with the common understanding of nature in Japan (and across the West when we talk about landscape), is that the intimacy with the landscape is developed, not through contemplation or by stating the village's geographical or aesthetic qualities, but by means of the works and tasks required throughout the village and their verbalization. Within the community, the landscape came forth, in daily life, by the act of caring for it as the common world that it is.

On one occasion, I had the following chat with a woman that was helping her husband planting a few big rice fields with a machine. Knowing that that I had planted rice by hand a few days ago, she asked me about it. When I said that it was a fun (*tanoshii*) experience, she replied: "When I was young we planted the entire village by hand – that wasn't fun at all!" Naturally, the fact that she did not think of it as 'fun' was due to the hardships she had experienced when rice-planting machines were not a part of the farming process. But on the other hand, on several other occasions that we spoke or that I helped her, her attitude regarding the doing of her tasks in the village showed a certain satisfaction, or pleasure, that was not supposed to be present in something that is not 'fun' – and it was not only in her that this was perceptible. As I gradually grew better acquainted with people around the village, engaging with them by means of small chats or the communitarian tasks we did together, I was able to see reflected in most of them that same attitude. Beyond the obligation that comes with the fact that rice farming were the means of sustenance for most households, the actual disposition and stance towards work was not one of an inevitable burden one carries with him. Rather, it was closer to a sense of duty and respect towards those who, within eyesight, were also absorbed in their own tasks. Mostly in communitarian tasks (where my engagement and participation were more substantial), the work was normally done with a great diligence and a shared sense of commitment in caring for the village. Some tasks were naturally

hard sometimes, but the ability to keep a good spirit endured. Somewhat unfamiliar with this mood, there was something that gradually gained some weight for me: there seemed to be an understanding of *work* somehow different from how we usually consider it.

With these remarks we will not try to unveil an inconsistency between what people say and what people do, but only an indication that deeper meanings can emerge when we grasp how ‘things’ speak through people, rather than when people speak about ‘things’. As Ingold (2002a, 147) puts it, “a way of speaking is, in itself, a way of living in the land”. It “celebrates an embodied knowledge of the world that is already shared thanks to people’s mutual involvement in the tasks of habitation”. At this point, then, more than a social scientist attitude of critical analysis, we should let our own human inquisitiveness take the lead by taking the encounter with morally or culturally different outlooks on the world as a possible source of new questions and inspirations. Hereafter, we could, eventually, embrace in a critical analysis of work, revealing the supposed Japanese ‘work mentality’ at play. But doing it would block the possibility of learning something meaningful with this community; and we would be answering ontic questions while ignoring the ontological ones. The question of work (or tasks), then, is crucial to formulate, not only the core argument of this essay, but also a local word I will explore next: *jon'nobi* (じよんのび).

The word *jon'nobi* first came across while planning my journey to Kazemura – yet, its meaning was never clear. It was during my stay, that the *kachō* lent me a book titled *Jon'nobi* – an inspiring book, without a doubt, almost a philosophical treatise on the aesthetics of planting rice and vegetables and working *with* nature. I was then told that the word *jon'nobi* was a local dialect used only in around half of the prefecture of Niigata and that the book was compiled around two decades ago by a few inhabitants from Kazemura and other communities nearby. Since it is charged with a blend of both physical and emotional components, is difficult to express it within a single definition, but the main idea behind it is the following: “the feeling of entering the *ofuro* after finishing a long day of hard work, from sunrise to sunset”. The word articulates, then, a feeling of wellness comprising both a physical (the pleasure of being immersed in hot water) and moral dimension (being able to carry a certain task, with dedication, until the end – we can think of it as a *good fatigue*). Actually, most of the book revolves around this idea: the wellbeing that stems from both a sense of accomplishment in one’s own work and from the possibility of enjoying the fruits of one’s own labor. In a sense, it

gives us a possible insight into how these people understand the value, not necessarily of the landscape, but of a life dedicated to the community.

Along with this word, another word that led me to mull over the role of work in this community was '*ikigai*' 生き甲斐, a word also mentioned in the book. *Ikigai* is an ordinary Japanese word that means 'life's goal', or how the French say it '*raison d'être*'. It can be understood as "what one most deeply live for", articulated between individual urges and social commitments (Mathews 1996a, see also 1996b). Within the horizon of this book, the *ikigai* pointed towards the dedication to the community, its maintenance and the possibility of enjoying what it can offer; and from its narrative is absent any reference to a quantitative conception of work, its economic or cost-effective dimensions. What is manifest, instead, is the pleasure and affection that one develops during and after the maintenance of the rice fields, roads, irrigation systems – of the whole community. It is mainly a matter of moral attunement with the place one lives, even if through weariness. The word itself can enlighten our argument: it literally means 'value in living', where '*iki*' is the stem of the verb '*ikiru*', 生きる, means 'to live' and '*gai*', 甲斐, stands for 'effect', 'result' or 'value'. Furthermore, in this word, the last character, 斐, '*i*' means 'patterned' or 'beautiful'. In its constitution, the word *ikigai* already encapsulates and articulates ideas of 'value' and 'pleasure'; pleasure in seeing the 'patterned' and the 'beautiful' taking shape in front of our eyes through our own actions, our own work.

In the book mentioned earlier, there is also the following passage: "When the sun hides, one stops working. And, at home, there is dinner. Our generation doesn't have pleasure in being seated; it feels good to move one's body. Weekends are no reason to rest. Working is our satisfaction, our hobby; our *ikigai*". These words might sound strong for some of us. And maybe this is because we are used to consider work as an obligation, as something that, if we could, we wouldn't do. On the other hand, any one of us is aware of the wellbeing that stems from finishing a certain job or task that we carried out with genuine will; the pleasure in contemplating and resting after finishing something made by our own hands – in other words, *jon'nobi*.

Both words (*jon'nobi* and *ikigai*) and the morality they enclose unlock the possibility of reflecting on the question of work from a non-economic standpoint. In this connection, work is not necessarily understood as the hand of human reason over nature, but as an act of *growing*; a compliance to "a productive dynamic that is immanent in the

natural world itself, rather than converting nature to an instrument” (Ingold 2002a, 81). In her book, *Crafting Selves*, Dorinne Kondo alerts us to the interconnection between humans, work and world, as expressed in her interlocutor’s speech, where the notion of *ikigai* also comes forth:

In Ohara-san’s [the factory’s chief artisan] narrative of work and life, the ultimate satisfaction was to be found in experiencing work as *ikigai*, a reason for living. This artisanal ideal, based on certain forms of learning and on a notion of maturity forged through the hardships of apprenticeship, involves another level of meaning. Self-realization through one’s art arises from certain kinds of relationships between people, their tools, the material world, and nature (Kondo 1990, 241).

There is both a ‘hardship’ (*kurō*) and ‘aesthetic’ dimension of work. In both Kondo’s interlocutors and in Kazemura, the hardship and poetry of work are visible in the way people talk about their undertakings, since, in both cases, work is faced as cooperation with the cycle of nature, with the passing of the seasons. Following Kondo, we should also consider the enthusiasm and aesthetics of speech and take them seriously, for they also exist as the way identity is formed: says: “clearly, work mobilizes emotion and draws upon aesthetic sensibilities, even a certain spirituality, in ways that contradict our expectations about ‘mere’ craft or industrial work” (1990, 255).

These ideas are present in the notion of *jon’nobi* as well: the emphasis on hard work along with an aesthetic or poetic verbalization of it. Naturally, in Kazemura’s case, the obvious feeling of cooperation with the natural world reinforces even further this aesthetics of work.

## **§5. The Landscape as an extension of consciousness**

The philosopher Edward Casey (2001, 417) called the landscape a “detotalized totality of places”. However, there is, it seems, something missing in this definition. Besides the physical dimension that this definition evokes (even if in its ‘infinity’ or ‘incompletion’), there is also something that gradually takes shape in human consciousness that gives human beings a sense of belonging to a community and surpasses the physical aspect of a place.

In section §2 we advanced a brief clarification of Being and saw that one of Heidegger’s remarks about *Dasein* is that it lives in constant *Sorge*, *Caring* about the

future possibilities of its own Being. If existing (*ex-sistere*) is to be always outside oneself, looking for the possibilities of our own Being, then what we would call the “mental processes” of that Being are also out there, outside one’s body. Just as Gregory Bateson argued (1987, 461–65), what we call *consciousness* or *mind* is not restricted by the skin; on the contrary, it should encompass the phenomenon we wish to understand or explain – what he calls the “organism-in-its-environment” (1987, 458). In this connection, the ‘extension of consciousness’ refers to the act of being practically engaged in the world, not to an idealization or mental representation of an object. If we understand Being as a relation with and towards something, speaking of ‘extension of consciousness’ implies taking into account the paths leading to what we are engaged with and the meanings that spring forth through those paths (Bateson 1987, 465).

The idea of landscape as an extension of consciousness should be considered bearing in mind the notions of ‘Being’ and ‘consciousness’ referred to above. The landscape is conceived not only as *this* particular place I inhabit and that physically surrounds me, but through the engagements and actions that express my relationship with other humans and places – like the *kachō*’s remarks on the idea of *furusato*. Existing in a continuous web of relationships with other human beings, places and *things*, this ‘extension of consciousnesses’ is not an individual or mental state, but the consummation of our own relations with others, the ways those relations evolve and, together with the actions of others, how they convey a sense of belonging. In Japanese society, the *machizukuri* (community-building) initiatives are one good example of that: an articulation of communitarian actions promoting small-scale changes in common spaces, whose roots go back, probably, to a strong communitarian ethics existing prior to the World Wars (Sorensen e Funck 2007; Sorensen et al. 2009).

The landscape and places we live in are both constituted by these relations and are themselves “imbued with the vitality that animates its inhabitants” (Ingold 2002a, 149). In other words, the landscape also comprises how a sense of belonging to a community takes shape through the “extensions” that constitute both our daily tasks – what Ingold (2002b) called *taskscape* – and the moral bonds of respect and responsibility we articulate with each other by inhabiting a common world, without being necessarily bounded by the human eye, some trees, roads or mountains.

## §6. Caring for a common world - final thoughts

Throughout this essay, we tried to *attend* to how the landscape was articulated by people in Kazemura by adding a phenomenological light to it and ended up reflecting, not on judgments or features that could be attributed to a certain physical place, but on human relationality conveyed, in this case, through a sense of intergenerational responsibility, work, tasks and the community maintenance; i.e., by bringing to light our sometimes forgotten condition that, whether we care for it or not, whether in a distant or proximate sense, we inhabit a common world.

By setting aside the common critical discourses that obscured the ontological potentiality of the Japanese idea of *furusato*, we started our inquiry by unveiling the moral dimension that lies implicit in it, as exposed by the *kachō*'s words. This morality, in turn, becomes manifest in how people, acting out of respect towards the previous generations and responsibility towards the next generations, dedicate themselves to *growing* their community – ultimately, we are talking about an attitude of *respect for what exists in the world*. Edward Relph called it “environmental humility”: not to be understood as an eulogy of nature nor as submission to ecological laws, but as a mode of being that respects “what there is in the world and seeks to protect it and even enhance it without denying its essential character or right to existence” (1981, 19). Far from the reifying attitude implicit in conceptions such as ‘cultural landscape’ or ‘world heritage’, ‘environmental humility’ (where ‘environment’ comprises places, buildings, people and things) conveys a multitude of ways of treating the world, where one “works *with* environments and circumstances rather than trying to manipulate and dominate them” (1981, 162 emphasis added). Relph’s environmental humility, as well as the morality underpinning the idea of *furusato*, is, first and foremost, a moral and practical orientation towards what exists in a common world and implies not just human beings, but literally everything.

However, to imply the ‘human’ when talking about landscape is not simply to repeat the old dictum that humans shape the land with their actions and tools. The gist of this idea is that apart from the landscape’s physical dimension (rivers, trees, mountains, and buildings) there is a human dimension that manifests itself, first of all, in the moral relation that gradually develops among a certain community’s inhabitants. Building on that, we refocused our attention *from* landscape *to* humans, reversing the ‘step ahead’, and started our inquiry from the stage ‘how the landscape is perceived in

them'. Which means that, to arrive at some kind of inference about a possible understanding of the landscape within this community, we should focus, first of all, in their daily life and begin, not from what people say *about* the landscape, but from how the landscape reveals itself in their actions, routines or conversations – in 'practical intentionality'.

This possibility led us to rethink work ethics. Here, it would have been futile any attempt to engage in any sort of explanation or rationalization of the attitude towards work, observed in Kazemura, through Japanese cultural concepts, the idea of 'working mentality' and so on. Instead, this was done through a direct comprehension of these people's lives in the acts of work itself, setting aside notions of work informed by Marxist ideas of productivity – the economic dimension of work – and thinking it, as Ingold invites us to do, as an act of *growing*, as in growing a child. In this regard, the 'Being-landscape' relation should be thought of, for example, in light of the relationship we have with our own children: grown and nurtured through a direct and sentient involvement with them. What life in Kazemura disclosed is that the 'Being-landscape' relationship is fostered by a diligent attitude of commitment, dedication and struggle; but it is also continually reinforced by the prospect of enjoying, appreciating and talking about the fruits of that same dedication and effort – and, sometimes, even to celebrate them.

The morality described so far thrives, not as some kind of a Japanese cultural trait, but because it has as its substance the place where these people live. Diligence, responsibility, hardships, pleasure and the aesthetics of speech – all these notions are perfectly compatible when human beings see, right in front of them, the fruits of his own actions, day after day, season after season, year after year. When these actions manifest themselves in a communitarian context and develop through a continuous, fruitful and intimate community management, done by our own hands, the bonds we create with both places and people are reinforced as well. Therefore, being able to grow and care for a common world allow us to keep – or reclaim – our psychological, affective and moral bonds with it.

Human existence, as articulated by Dasein's Being, implies existing outside itself, in a continuous relational engagement with other human beings, places and things. And the places we inhabit comprise also how a sense of belonging to a community gradually takes shape through our common tasks – without being necessarily bounded by the human eye or by those trees or mountains over there. We can almost say that the

landscape can be thought of, not *only* as a physical place, but also through an awareness of our own connections with others and through our independent and common actions. If we think about the connections between human beings, the tasks they engage in and the places where they do it, the landscape turns out to be more than *only* the material environment within our eyes reach and discloses itself as a more comprehensive awareness of our own belonging to a common world.

And what you thought you came for  
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning  
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled  
If at all. Either you had no purpose  
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured  
And is altered in fulfilment.

T.S Eliot, *Little Gidding*

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