

The Sacred: The Enchantment of the Primitive, *Agro-philia*

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The love of horizontal space—*agro-philia*¹ is often a sarcastic remark about Americans' predilection for flat, widespread, pragmatic spaces, resulting from the modern utility of the machine, of efficiency, speed, and mobility. Yet, at the same time this special love for horizontality ironically points to what has been taken away from us by a modern obsession: our innate preference for agricultural settlements. The horizontal in this sense no longer refers to the visual and mechanical organization of space; but rather, it recalls a deeper quest for landscape experience and meanings formed over millions of years of our evolutionary past as *Homo erectus*. The notion of *agro-philia*, a complex and fundamental love of landscape, therefore warrants further examination.

The paper attempts an aesthetic account of the notion of *agro-philia* in a quest to illuminate the nature of sacred landscapes related to the primitive: archetypal symbolism. Three positions are put forward for both theoretical explanation and practical application: 1) The love of the horizontal is the universal, primal, and arises from the unconscious topography of life process—the primitive; 2) this is an innate love of the primitive that is archetypal, and its mystic and symbolic associations with a Creator manifests the Sacred; and 3) the sacred landscape expresses the aesthetics of the ambiguity of a twofold horizon (between earth and sky) that proliferates into types and features of poetic landscapes. Under this theoretical framework, the paper can explore and identify landscape typologies that possibly contain a general structure of the sacred, and evolve to poetic narratives of everyday landscapes.

***Agro-philia*: The Desire for Life Processes**

The horizon is a geometrically and perceptually perfect circular line, essential to the measure of the Euclidean plane as well as the concrete corporeal world. It is the virtual line by which the eye level of a person defines the horizon and by which a person judges its distance. This distance of vision becomes the metaphysical and imaginary boundary of earth and sky. This provides us with our basic understanding of the order of things.² Life strives to keep its equilibrium and to maintain the tension between the vertical and horizontal by standing and upright against gravity on earth with a craving for receiving light from the sky.

The horizontal plane thus becomes a symbolic threshold between life and death, earth and sky, spirit and flesh, while humans dwell in the in-between, as it is referred to when it is a transition between two worlds (人間 in the Chinese character). The vastness of the horizontal landscape might have provoked the instinctual urge of primitive humans to build vertical figures or to dwell in a distinctive place for survival and reproduction. A tension or a passion for self-preservation in association with the idea of danger (of being visible) is capable of producing “a sort of delightful horror,”³ -the Sublime. It can be argued that *Agro-philia* therefore is a primitive attraction toward life processes in nature that are unconscious, original, and universal.

The Preference for the Primitive: The Search for Archetypal Symbolism

That which is “primal and original”⁴ is deemed archetypal. C.G. Jung defines archetype as primordial types with universal images of our collective humanity, and he refers to it collective

representations, motifs, or categories of the imagination.⁵ The primitive is our lower being of the unconscious heart, by which all humans are indispensably connected; yet the primitive is detached from higher being in the conscious mind of modern individuals. As the health of the eye and our sense of a stable presence in the world demands a horizon as a territorial mark of a human presence and as a sign of eternity, so does the health of the human psyche yearn for a balance (a tension) between our higher and lower being. In that respect our preference for the primitive mirrors a modern person's desire to restore his or her soul, self, home, and mother earth that have been progressively taken from us by the rise of civilization.

Nature encompasses all archetypes, for archetypes represent the symbols of creation. Myths and symbols are always a true account of the Creator for primitive humans. Primitive humans see themselves as Children of the Mother earth,⁶ and they dwell in the anthropomorphic world, a living reality. The reality for the primitive is an extension of themselves where all the things are interconnected by all souls, animated by natural phenomena, and characterized in terms of living relationships. Jung asserts that a healthy relationship of ourselves to the world springs from a commonsense human behavior that is archetypically coded into each of us, and becomes Sacred especially when it recognizes the Creator.⁷ "The most primitive of all sacred places known in the history of religion is the archetypal, simple landscape of stones, water, and trees,"⁸ writes Eliade.

The Sacred Landscapes: The Aesthetics of Ambiguity

Sacred places appeal to humanity, for they are personified and perceived by our inner being (the primitive) that helps us converse with the absolute Creator (Nature). The sacred landscape always manifests itself in symbolism that connotes life and the fear of death, which seems congruent with Burke's aesthetic account of the Sublime-delight and horror. The lure of sacred places is a reflection of our healthy wish to connect mortality with eternity by carrying multiple inner images of our existence that emerge from (and merges into) a two fold horizon between sky and earth.

This suggests that the sacred landscapes be essentially precarious and mysterious. Such aesthetics of ambiguity and of the 'in-between' are what makes sacred landscapes poetically powerful, for it demands our imagination—a constant interplay and embodiment between reason and emotion, reaching beyond the self to the world. The aesthetics of a sacred landscape are never a formal beauty of balance, harmony, and unity outside of a given context; rather it becomes greater than itself when it is seen within ourselves, together with the world around us. This paper will reveal a further description of the aesthetics of ambiguity, and in doing so, it will explore varied characteristics of sacred landscapes in relation to surface, movement, and feature.⁹ (see *Appendices*)

In conclusion, the paper provides a theoretical explanation of *agro-philia* as an aesthetic account of Sacred landscapes. It argues that the enchantment of the horizontal is associated with the existential, symbolic, and biological origin of an aesthetic preference for the primitive. This innate feeling of the unconscious speaks about our tireless salvation of life from death, and invigorates the human desire to discover, create, and apprehend sacred landscapes as we find them in the vast desert, in aboriginal grasslands, and in thousands of ruins of ancient or inhabited settlements. The archetypal landscape exhibits the precarious yet at the same time richest layers of human life in the pursuit of symbols and myths that are in harmony with the environment, as we naturally and intuitively understand it. It represents our prolonged worship of sacred spaces, and more importantly, it helps to invoke poetic experiences of our common landscapes.

Appendices

- Local to global
- Individual to collective
- Unique to universal
- Subjective to objective
- Austere to luscious
- Tranquility to turmoil
- Simple but not static, rather animated
- Symbolic but not abstract, rather concrete
- Sensory, but not necessarily sensuous or effeminate, rather sensible
- Spiritual, but not necessarily religious
- Symmetry, but not necessarily a linear axis, rather geometric (spatial axis mundi)
- All soundscapes such as the songs of birds, waves, wind, because they are spatial.
- Crude to noble
- Banal to abstruse
- Inhabited to imagined
- Novel to familiar
- Childlike to grace
- Secure to severe
- Vertical to horizontal
- Biological, through psychological, to phenomenological
- Archaic to alchemic
- Archetypal to phenotypical

Endnotes

1. John B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 70.
2. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space, and Architecture* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 17-18
3. Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 124.
4. Carl G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, trans. W.S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1933), 125.
5. ----- *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton University Press/Bollingen Series XX, 1969), 5.
6. ----- *The Earth Has a Soul: C. G. Jung on Nature, Technology, and Modern Life*, ed. Meredith Sabini (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2007)
7. ----- *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton University Press/Bollingen Series XX, 1969), 102-129
8. Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 25.
9. Hyejung Chang, "Mapping the Web of Landscape Aesthetics" (Ph.D. diss., North Carolina State University, 2009), 363-365