

'Nature is parts without a whole'

Fernando Pessoa¹

What is nature? A highly resonant contemporary question arising from growing anxieties and about our current ecological situation. Perhaps this exists as an older concern, its origins emerging from early human settlement, the point at which we began manipulating the environment to suit our own needs. And so began an appropriation; now immeasurable, acute at a universal scale, yet infinitesimal within our fleeting human chronology - a stable romantic memory experienced by passing generations. Our collective 'landscape memories' are an artifice or 'construct' as defined by Lucius Burckhardt², the word itself - landscape - a perfunctory definition, one of measurement, not originally intended to express poetic qualities or condition. Borrowing from Gunther Vogt's³ position, this appropriation of landscape is 'cultivated'; after millennia of occupation a place accommodating farming, industry and dwelling. A landscape of social, commercial and cultural value, aesthetically appropriated.

AD 122, the emperor Hadrian imposes a new physical boundary - a line scribing a dramatic landscape in the most northerly county of the United Kingdom. Hadrian's Wall would mark the edge of empire, bringing order to an inhospitable landscape and its people. A material un-natural intervention, a landscape artificially modified on a scale never before witnessed. Physical mark as expression of political, cultural and social dominance; an intense appropriation of place and landscape.

Consider an expanded timeframe, beyond human existence. The end of the Carboniferous period, approximately 295 million years ago resulting in the creation of the Whin Sill. A dolerite formation, particular to Northumberland and upon which for around 300 years sections of Hadrian's wall would rest and serve its function. Suddenly the glaring ephemerality of the human condition and our invented chronology is exposed against the immutability of geological time. Yet, its physical existence has shaped history, culture and identity. Ultimately, this 73-mile physical contour line, would succumb to new varieties of human activity and desires; no longer a boundary but a resource, its physical presence reduced, disbursed and absorbed by the new occupations and needs of the surrounding landscape. Now as monument, its existence feels deficient, static, without energy or purpose. Does it now only exist as a device to collapse time, a way to relive history, or can it contribute to a new environmentally conscious future within this ever-shifting place?

How is this narrative distilled to an essence, a single word to be protected and cherished? Perhaps this word is '*wholeness*'. We need a response to Fernando Pessoa's quote, a reaction against increasing specialised opinion and what Robert MacFarlane⁴ refers to as 'the dry meta-languages of modern policy making'. We require a more holistic way of understanding our landscape, sympathetic to the frailty of the human condition, our stories, beliefs, misplaced desires. Our intrusions should maintain an undamaged state.

whole. *adj.* **1.** complete; entire. > emphasising a large extent or number: *a whole range of issues.* **2** in an unbroken or undamaged state. > with no part removed. **n.** all that is complete in itself.

500 words excluding references below.

1. The Keeper of Sheep XLVII. Fernando Pessoa & Co – Selected Poems. (1998) Grove Press, New York
2. Fezer J., Schmitz M. (2012) Why Is Landscape Beautiful? (1979). In: Fezer J., Schmitz M. (eds) Lucius Burckhardt Writings. Rethinking Man-made Environments. Springer, Vienna
3. Gunther Vogt. (2015) Landscape as a Cabinet of Curiosities. In Search of a Position. Lars Muller Publishers
4. Robert MacFarlane (2015) Landmarks. Penguin.

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