

FAMILIARITY/ FOREIGNNESS OF LANDSCAPE

A way of landscape existence recognised by an individual perceiving it, expressed in what is familiar (homely, recognizable) or foreign (alien, unknown, different) from the point of view of factors determining its aesthetic, cultural, social, natural and other qualities. The sense of familiarity is the effect of establishing a relationship of closeness with the landscape, the sense of alienation results from maintaining a distance.

Proximity and distance can be felt towards the landscape understood in spatial, temporal, emotional, ethical and sensual terms. The visual factor is of key importance here: the views typical of a given place or region are the first point of reference in the landscape assessment (the mountain landscape, specific to a highlander, will be alien to a sailor).

We are often involved in the landscape, to which we have been tied since childhood. We consider alien a landscape that is different from the one we know best. Two attitudes are of key importance here: that of the native, for whom the landscape has its own expression, and the stranger, who must first get used to it in order to distance himself from the feeling of alienation. Sometimes we feel closeness to landscapes that are objectively unfavourable, dangerous and unfriendly (inhabitants of Siberia, Alaska, the foot of volcanoes, etc.). In such cases identification with the landscape takes place on the basis of other qualities, e.g. those focused on the notion of homeland and the father's legacy.

Taming a foreign landscape (e.g. by immigrants) sometimes involves trying to organise it in a familiar and security modelling way among similar people, for example of the same nationality. Then communities with a similar system of values emerge in foreign spaces. Enclaves of Chinese settlers in American cities (Chinatown), Polish districts with Polish shops in the cities of Great Britain or Hindu in Singapore fill an alien space with characteristic architecture, graphic symbols, signs, street names. Places can be tamed by colonisation introducing its own architecture (e.g. French concession in Shanghai), vegetation, customs, practices (e.g. coffee plantations in Africa) into an alien landscape.

Classic examples illustrating the sense of homeliness and alienation are the attitudes of the inhabitant and the tourist. The former evaluates the place through its functional and utility qualities. The latter attitude entails superficial contact and temporary stay (which may or may not necessarily create a familiarity). Remaining for a long time in a specific place does not in itself guarantee the creation of closeness, because this requires identifying with the values in force: the stronger the identification, the less the feeling of alienation. The degree of identification is determined by factors such as language (which, especially for immigrants, may be a barrier to establishing a relationship of closeness to the place and its inhabitants), readiness to participate in rituals and social life (building housing, transforming the area, creating social norms, cultivating certain customs and habits). Sometimes people who have been in exile for a long time do not create a relationship of closeness with the newly inhabited place, longing for their homeland. On the other hand, we sometimes feel close to the place where we are staying for a short time.

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