

What follows are some borrowed thoughts on time and our experience of time through the land. They come from a small handful of authors, though I've tried to arrange them to flow as a single reading. At the end are a few links to works of art that have a similar resonance, for me, as the readings. They are works that address the flow of life over time, and address our place in that constantly moving stream.

Between [people] who have never had the slightest personal acquaintance, and whom everything has kept apart - nature, distance, time - the life of forms establishes an intimate relationship. 6

The truth is that we are all potential fossils still carrying within our bodies the crudities of former existences, the marks of a world in which living creatures flow with little more consistency than clouds from age to age. 4

We tend to think of places like the Arctic, the Antarctic, the Gobi, the Sahara, the Mojave, as primitive, but there are in fact no primitive or even primeval landscapes. Neither are there permanent landscapes. And nowhere is the land empty or underdeveloped. It cannot be improved upon with technological assistance. The land, an animal that contains all other animals, is vigorous and alive. The challenge to us, when we address the land, is to join with cosmologists in their ideas of continuous creation, and with physicists with their ideas of spatial and temporal paradox, to see the subtle grace and mutability of the different landscapes. They are crucibles of mystery, precisely like the smaller ones that they contain... 7

Because the eye loves novelty and can get used to almost any scene, even one of horror, much of life can drift into the vague background of our attention. How easy it is to overlook...the tiny fangs of a staple, or the way intense sorrow makes people bend their bodies as if they were blowing in a high wind. 1

Through how many dimensions and how many media will life have to pass? Down how many roads among the stars must man propel himself in search of the final secret? The journey is difficult, immense, at times impossible, yet that will not deter some of us from attempting it. We cannot know all that has happened in the past, or the reason for all of these events, any more than we can with surety discern what lies ahead. We have joined the

caravan, you might say, at a certain point; we will travel as far as we can, but we cannot in one lifetime see all that we would like to see or learn all that we hunger to know. 4

A Lakota woman named Elaine Jahner once wrote that what lies at the heart of the religion of hunting peoples is the notion that a spiritual landscape exists within the physical landscape. To put it another way, occasionally one sees something fleeting in the land, a moment when line, color, and movement intensify and something sacred is revealed, leading one to believe that there is another realm of reality corresponding to the physical one but different.

In the face of a rational, scientific approach to the land, which is more widely sanctioned, esoteric insights and speculations are frequently overshadowed, and what is lost is profound. The land is like poetry: it is inexplicably coherent, it is transcendent in its meaning, and it has the power to elevate a consideration of human life. 7

Though most of us don't hunt, our eyes are still the great monopolists of our senses. To taste or touch your enemy or your food, you have to be unnervingly close to it. To smell or hear it, you can risk being farther off. But vision can rush through the fields and up the mountains, travel across time, country, and parsecs of outer space, and collect information as it goes. Animals that hear high frequencies better than we do - bats and dolphins, for instance - seem to see richly with their ears, hearing geographically, but for us the world becomes most densely informative, most luscious, when we take it in through our eyes. It may even be that abstract thinking evolved from our eyes' elaborate struggle to make sense of what they saw. 1

I looked out over the Bering Sea and brought my hands folded to the breast of my parka and bowed from the waist deeply toward the north, that great strait filled with life, the ice and the water. I held the bow to the pale sulphur sky at the northern rim of the earth. I held the bow until my back ached, and my mind was emptied of its categories and designs, its plans and speculations. I bowed before the simple evidence of the moment in my life in a tangible place on the earth that was beautiful.

When I stood I thought I glimpsed my own desire. The landscape and the animals were like something found at the end of a dream. The edges of the real landscape became one with the edges of something I had dreamed. But what I had dreamed was only a pattern, some beautiful pattern of light. The continuous work of the imagination, I thought,

to bring what is actual together with what is dreamed is an expression of human evolution. The conscious desire is to achieve a state, even momentarily, that like light is unbounded, nurturing, suffused with wisdom and creation, a state in which one has absorbed that very darkness which before was the perpetual sign of defeat.

Whatever the world is, it lies far ahead. But its outline, its adumbration, is clear in the landscape, and upon this one can actually hope we will find our way. 7

Now “preparation” is a treacherous idea. ...The idea of using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself. It omits, and even shuts out, the very conditions by which a person can be prepared for his future. We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. 2

In moments when I felt perplexed, that I was dealing with an order outside my own, I discovered and put to use a part of my own culture's wisdom, the formal divisions of Western philosophy- metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and logic - which pose, in order, the following questions. What is real? What can we understand? How should we behave? What is beautiful? What are the patterns we can rely on?

As I traveled, I would say to myself, What do my companions see where I see death? Is the sunlight beautiful to them, the way it sparkles on the water? Which for [them] are the patterns to be trusted? The patterns, I know, could be different from the ones I imagined were before us. There could be other, remarkably different insights. 7

Perhaps it is the suggestion that all one's life one has been tricked, all unaware, by the structure of language into a certain way of perceiving reality, with the implication that awareness of this trickery will enable one to see the world with fresh insight. 9

Perhaps there is no meaning at all, the thought went on inside me, save that of journey itself, so far as men can see. It has altered with the chances of life, and the chances brought us here; but it was a good journey – long, perhaps – but a good journey under a pleasant sun. Do not look for the purpose. Think of the way we came and be a little proud. Think of this hand – the utter pain of its first venture on the pebbly shore. 4

For form is surrounded by a certain aura: although it is our most strict definition of space, it also suggests to us the existence of other forms. It prolongs and diffuses itself throughout our dreams and fancies: we regard it, as it were, as a kind of fissure through which crowds of images aspiring to birth may be introduced into some indefinite realm - a realm which is neither that of physical extent nor that of pure thought. 6

No culture has yet solved the dilemma each has faced with the growth of a conscious mind: how to live a moral and compassionate existence when one is fully aware of the blood, the horror inherent in all life, when one finds darkness not only in one's culture but within oneself. If there is a stage at which an individual life becomes truly adult, it must be when one grasps the irony in its unfolding and accepts responsibility for a life lived in the midst of such paradox. One must live in the middle of contradiction because if all contradiction were eliminated at once life would collapse. 7

Forms transfigure the aptitudes and movements of the mind more than they specialize them. Forms receive accent from the mind, but not configuration. Forms are, as the case may be, intellect, imagination, memory, sensibility, instinct, character; they are, as the case may be, muscular vigor, thickness or thinness of the blood. But forms, as they work on these data, train and tutor them ceaselessly and uninterruptedly. 6

I might say that my mental image of the relation [between connected ideas] is not at all one of ideas hitched together by bonds of attachment which they possess like miniature hooks and eyes. It is more a concept of continuity, with the ideas as relative locations in a continuous medium. 9

Make no mistake. Everything in the mind is in rat's country. It doesn't die. They are merely carried, these disparate memories, back and forth in the desert of a billion neurons, set down, picked up, and dropped again by mental pack rats. Nothing perishes, it is merely lost till a surgeon's electrode starts the music of an old player piano whose scrolls are dust. Or you yourself do it, tossing in the restless nights, or even in the day on a strange street when a burdy-gurdy plays. Nothing is lost, but it can never be again as it was. You will only find the bits and cry out because they were yourself. Nothing can begin again and go right, but still is is you, your mind, picking endlessly over the splintered glass of a mirror

dropped and broken long ago. That is all time is at the end when you are old – splintered glass. 5

One of the oldest dreams of mankind is to find a dignity that might include all living things. And one of the greatest of human longings must be to bring such dignity to one's own dreams, for each to find his or her own life exemplary in some way. The struggle to do this is a struggle because an adult sensibility must find some way to include all the dark threads of life. A way to do this is to pay attention to what occurs in a land not touched by human schemes, where an original order prevails. 7

[W]e bring our own worlds to bear in foreign landscapes in order to clarify them for ourselves. It is hard to imagine that we could do otherwise. The risk we take is of finding our final authority in the metaphors rather than in the land. To inquire into the intricacies of a distant landscape, then, is to provoke thoughts about one's own interior landscape, and the familiar landscapes of memory. The land urges us to come around to an understanding of ourselves. 7

Every time we walk along a beach some ancient urge disturbs us so that we find ourselves shedding shoes and garments or scavenging among seaweed and whitened timbers like the homesick refugees of a long war. 3

I ought to have been born by the sea – any sea – and I have a strong suspicion that this inclination is present in all human beings. The ocean calls us for it is the ancient and original home, not only of mankind but of all life. 8

It appears to me impossible that I should cease to exist, or that this active, restless spirit, equally alive to joy and sorrow, should be only organized dust. 10

Two works of art by Jorg Lenslinger & Gerda Steiner

Falling Garden

[http://www.steinerlenzlinger.ch/eye\\_giardino.html](http://www.steinerlenzlinger.ch/eye_giardino.html)

Soul Warmer

[http://www.steinerlenzlinger.ch/eye\\_seelenwarmer.html](http://www.steinerlenzlinger.ch/eye_seelenwarmer.html)

Clicking the main image takes you through a series of images from the same piece, on this site.

Carol Selter

Animalia

<http://www.carolselter.com/selectedworks/animalia/images>

Jim Campbell

Scattered Light

[http://www.jimcampbell.tv/portfolio/public\\_art/madison\\_square\\_park/scattered\\_light/](http://www.jimcampbell.tv/portfolio/public_art/madison_square_park/scattered_light/)

Please watch the video (right hand column, with arrow)

Christine Nguyen

What the Ocean Left Behind

<http://www.lephant.com/index.php?/salt-experiments/crystals/>

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1. Diane Ackerman Natural History of the Senses
2. John Dewey Experience and Education
3. Loren Eiseley The Unexpected Universe
4. Loren Eiseley The Immense Journey
5. Loren Eiseley All the Strange Hours
6. Henri Focillon The Life of Forms in Art
7. Barry Lopez Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape
8. Farley Mowat Born Naked
9. Benjamin Lee Whorf Language, Thought, and Reality
10. Mary Wollstonecraft Letters