

# The Interiority of Landscape: Gate, Journey, Horizon

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**ABSTRACT:** Landscape has its own interiority. It is an interiority constituted by the same interiority that belongs to any and every place: through entry, movement, and boundary; through gate, journey and horizon. This essay explores the nature of the interiority at issue here, with specific reference to landscape and landscape forms, but also with an eye to the larger structure of place which it exemplifies. Drawing on the work of Colin McCahon, as well as the ideas of Georg Simmel and Martin Heidegger, the aim will be to sketch the inextricability of the three elements at issue, and so to demonstrate the character of landscape as residing, not in some uninterrupted stretch of countryside nor in what may appear merely as the scenic backdrop to human activity, but in the intertwining of horizon, journey and gate, and so in landscape as one form of the opening and emergence of place.

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There is a gap there you can look through into infinity (Colin McCahon, 1979, said of the paintings of Braque – in Gordon, 1984: 54).

[Fig 1: Colin McCahon, *French Bay*, 1957, Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki. © McCahon Trust, used by permission]. *Note that images have been removed from this pre-publication version.*

1, It is commonplace to talk of the increasingly fluidity and virtuality of contemporary spatial environments. Yet what is the real content of such talk? Is the 'virtual' anything other than another mode of engagement – one specifically mediated by technology – within the already existent materiality of the world? (see eg. Malpas 2009). What would it mean for there to be an increase or of alteration in any such mode of engagement? What is fluidity – is its use here metaphorical, and if so what is the nature of the metaphor? Is it only *space* that is properly at issue here, or (assuming their distinction) is *place* also implicated? Is the virtuality and fluidity at issue actually a reflection of the more basic dynamism of *place* itself, a dynamism in which flow appears in the open emergence of the boundless within the realm of the bounded – flow as appearing in the taking place of *place*? In this brief essay, my aim is to undertake a partial exploration of flow through an understanding of the dynamics of *landscape* as given in gate, journey and horizon. This means that what is attempted is essentially a rethinking of flow *from the perspective of place* – a rethinking of flow even as it might be construed as also a fluidity in and of space. It is also, of course, a rethinking of landscape and its structure – a rethinking of its own *interiority* (see also Malpas, 2015: esp. 77-85).

2. How do we enter into landscape? The very question may seem strange. Surely landscape is that which we find ourselves already 'in' as the background to our movement through and across it –

it is already simply 'there'. Yet we are never entirely 'in' landscape as if it were already completely given before us – not only can we move between landscapes as we can move between places, but even in being 'in' a landscape, the landscape itself is never simply open to us. The experience of being 'in' landscape, if we attend to it, is more akin to the experience of a constant opening of the landscape – and so a constant moving into it. Without a sense of entry 'into', landscape becomes merely an uninterrupted stretch of territory that we traverse – a spatial region, whose boundaries are more or less arbitrary, and that is given its primary representation, in an objective sense, in the form of the map. One may even go further and say that without a sense of entry, and of entry into, with the sense of movement *across a threshold* (namely a *limen*, which is also a *limes*, a boundary) which that brings with it, there can be no sense of landscape *as landscape* – no sense of orientation such that landscape can even appear. The idea of *entry into* is itself connected with the sense of landscape as that *within which* we find ourselves – the sense of the 'within' requires a sense of the 'without', and so also the sense of connection of these and the possibility of movement between them (see Malpas, 2015). The sense of 'within' that belongs to landscape derives from the understanding of landscape as a mode *of place*, and it is in this sense that landscape must be understood as possessing an essential *interiority* that is also, as in every interiority, an *opening up*.

3. Interiority surely belongs first *to the room* – although what the room is, and what counts as exemplary of the room, should not be taken for granted. The room is that which *gives room*, which gives *space* (the connection here being stronger in the German in which *Raum* means both 'space' and 'room' in a way only partially recalled in some uses of the English 'room'). The way in which the room gives room, however, is also tied to the character of the room as enclosed. It is in being enclosed that the room is indeed constituted *as a room*, and so as that in which room is made. The giving of room thus occurs through the enclosing of space, and this enclosing can also be said to give rise to interiority – the latter being the 'within' of the enclosed. If interiority belongs to the room, as it surely does, then 'room' is just that which names the space of interiority, no matter how it is instantiated, whether in the interiority given by the spaces of the ordinary house or the interiority that belongs to any and every place, as that which allows a mode of being-in that is

also a being-there – including the interiority of landscape.

4. Every 'room' has its 'door' (where 'door' is understood 'functionally' rather than merely 'conventionally'). The door – and, along with the door, the *gate* (or any such 'portal') – allows both entry and departure (it allows *movement* whereas the window, as window, allows *communication*). The door is thus the marker of a certain limitation or bound, and yet it is also that by means of which that limitation or bound is, even if never completely, surpassed. Georg Simmel writes that: "The enclosure of his or her being by the door means, to be sure, that they have separated out a piece of natural being. But just as formless limitation takes on a shape, its limitedness finds its significance and dignity only in that which the mobility of the door illustrates: in the possibility at any moment of stepping out of limitation into freedom" (Simmel, 1997). In Simmel's terms, the 'movement through' that the door allows constitutes a 'stepping out' into the free, but it is also a movement into or from *an interiority* as well as into or from that which is *exterior*. The door, or the gate, allows both entry and departure, and both of these constitute a 'stepping out' into the free, as well as a movement into or from *an interiority* and also into or from that which is *exterior*. Here the free is not to be understood as identical with the unbounded. Just as the room 'has' room in virtue of its walls, so only with bounds do freedom or boundlessness genuinely open up – thus one might say that the infinite opens up as infinite only *within the finite*. The door or gate, as the point of entry or departure, partly establishes that into which it opens or from which it closes. Similarly, the entry into landscape is what establishes that landscape and so also marks its bounds. Interiority is just the sense of openness within bounds into which one can enter or from which one can depart.

[Fig 2: The Grotto at Bowood House, Wiltshire, England. View from the grotto back towards Bowood House. © Copyright Linda Bailey, image used under Creative Commons Licence – original available at <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/108020>]

5. Door and gate stand in an essential relation to horizon or boundary. The door and gate afford entry, and it is only with the entry into the field of appearance constituted by the horizon that

the horizon becomes effective *as* horizon – only with the entry into the field of appearance that the boundary functions to *bound* (and ‘to bound’, it should be noted, is not the same as, nor is it even etymologically connected with, ‘to bind’). Movement, *or flow*, occurs both *into and out of*, but also *between and within* – within the space opened up by the horizon and so between places opened up within the landscape (as well as between other landscapes, other places, and so within the larger horizon of world). Moreover, in its character as boundary, so the horizon is itself active, shifting, indeterminate – altering as the movement and activity within it also alters. Boundaries, and horizons, are thus not mere lines (and no mere line suffices as a horizon or as boundary proper), just as what lies within the horizon is not just some delimited area of extended space. Horizon and boundary establish a region and thus they function to allow separation, but they do so in a way that also connects – it is thus that movement or flow is indeed always and only a movement – across, between, into, and out of – that operates precisely in relation to the boundary. Entry and departure belong to the boundary as they do also to the horizon. It is through movement *across* the boundary – through entry and departure – that we are oriented in landscape in such a way that we can then move *within* the landscape (though every movement has its own threshold, its own character as a movement *across*, even when it is also a movement *within*). Landscape opens up within its horizon, is oriented in relation to entry and departure into and from it, and is shaped by and through the journeys that are possible within it.

Fig 3: Leigh Woolley – Hobart from across the Derwent. © Copyright Leigh Woolley, used by permission

6. A common claim in contemporary discussions, especially in those that thematize ‘virtuality’ and ‘fluidity’, is that “there is no such thing as a boundary” (see eg. Thrift, 2006). Yet this can be no more than hyperbole at best, since in the absence of the boundary there can be no gate, no horizon, no journey, no landscape, no place, no flow, no connection, nothing ‘virtual’ nor ‘real’, nothing to speak of whatsoever. Heidegger draws attention to the underlying point at issue here in the course of a discussion of the connection between boundary and space in a way that also

resonates with what was said above concerning the connection between boundary and *room*: “A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary [*Grenze*], Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary” (Heidegger, 1971b). The boundary does not simply *restrict*, but properly understood, the boundary is precisely that which *produces*. Indeed, without the boundary no thing can come to presence, no thing can appear. The rejection of the boundary is often coupled, in contemporary discussions (including that exemplified by Thrift), with a contrasting emphasis on the idea of flow itself understood as an unbounded relationality. There is a fundamental misconception at work here, however, since the idea of boundary does not stand in contrast to that of relation, but is rather intimately tied to it. The boundary may separate, but in its separating it also connects – there is no separation that is not also a connecting, and no connection that is not also a separating (a point made especially clear in Heidegger, 2002). The idea of an unbounded relationality of the sort supposedly at issue in the idea of pure ‘flow’ is simply a confusion – inasmuch as it involves the dissolution of bounds, so it involves the dissolution of anything to be related, the removal of the difference on which the very possibility of flow depends (for a discussion that is more specific to the position exemplified by Thrift see Malpas, 2012a). Without boundary there is no flow. The boundedness of landscape is itself directly tied to the relationality or connectivity that makes for the structure of landscape and that is expressed in the form of journey and movement – even though it is also a boundedness that opens into the unbounded. Only within a horizon can a journey be undertaken; only within bounds can there be a between; only within bounds can there be an infinity, can the unbounded open up. To repeat Simmel: ‘the mobility of the door illustrates... the possibility at any moment of stepping out of limitation into freedom’ – here the connection between boundary, or limit, and the unbounded is affirmed. The door or gate stands both within and between places – and so at their boundary – marking the boundedness of one place as well as enabling entry into the openness of another. As that which allows entry, the door or gate does indeed have an essential mobility, as Simmel puts it, and is thus also the marker of the relationality of the boundary. The door and gate themselves stand in

a close relation to the bridge, that which enables the passage over and across, and which, through the connecting of that which is separated, also makes salient that very separation – in the form of the bridge, connecteness itself brings forth boundedness.

Fig 4: Leigh Woolley –Tasman Bridge, Hobart. © Copyright Leigh Woolley, used by permission

7. The bridge functions both to connect and to separate; it opens up a between, and in doing so establishes distinct places. As Heidegger writes, in an especially significant passage: “The bridge swings over the stream with ease and power. It does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge designedly causes them to lie across from each other... With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighbourhood” (Heidegger, 1971b). In fact, the character of the bridge in this respect already appears in Simmel, for whom it is directly related to the character of human being: “Because the human being is the connecting creature who must always separate and cannot connect without separating – that is why we must first conceive intellectually of the merely indifferent existence of two river banks as something separated in order to connect them by means of a bridge. And the human being is likewise the bordering creature who has no border” (Simmel, 1997: 170). Simmel’s final comment here is also echoed by Heidegger. The human being, he says, is “the one] who walks the boundary of the boundless” (Heidegger, 1971a: 41). The connecting/separating that the bridge exemplifies indicates the character of the bridge as itself functioning in direct relation to the boundary, indicating, in turn, the way such connecting/separating is part of the structure of place as well as operating between places. The productive character of the boundary, including its role in relation to bridge, door, and gate, does not differ between different polities, societies, cultures, institutions, social formations – it is a fundamental *ontological* structure that may be obscured, but not obliterated. The very possibility of appearance begins *at and with the boundary* and not with that which appears within it. It is thus that one might be led to affirm that the boundary is more powerful than the centre. As Ed Casey puts it of the particular form of boundary that he terms the ‘edge’: “The

*power is in the edge*...the endemic Western metaphysical privileging of centrist models of power and force here falls short – indeed, falls flat... the edges of landscape contain an unsuspected power... *Every edge has power*” (Casey 2012: 101). Every edge bounds, and so every edge opens up – it is ‘at the edge’ that space, ‘room’, and landscape first appear.

[Insert Fig 5: Colin McCahon, ‘Northland Triptych’, 1959, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago. © McCahon Trust, used by permission].

8. In the work of the seminal twentieth-century New Zealand painter Colin McCahon, the issues of entry, journey and horizon develop as key elements in his approach to landscape, or, as one might also say, to place – and place is certainly at issue at the very heart of McCahon’s work. For McCahon, the question of entry is first a question of how to enter into landscape as it is given in the painting – how to enter into the open realm of the landscape through the flat painted surface. Indeed, this is a question *for* painting as well as for landscape *in* painting. His solution is to employ differing views, movement, contrasting panels – these, like the paintings themselves, are both his *gates* and his *journeys* (hence the title of one of his most important and major retrospectives – see Gifkins, 1988). The landscape that appears in McCahon’s works is itself understood in terms of its essential relationality – a relationality that moves out in all directions as part of the horizontal opening of and to the landscape. It is this relationality, and the openness that belongs to it, that is space. McCahon writes that “Space is no longer tied to the Renaissance heresy of lines running back from the picture frame but is freed from these ties to reach out in all directions from the painted surface of the picture” (McCahon, 1954: 69). As McCahon’s work developed over the course of his career, it moved, in the words of the catalogue for McCahon’s 1961 *Gate* exhibition, towards “an even more ‘abstract’ style in paintings whose forms, with their forceful antithesis of black and white, ‘earth’ and ‘sky’, often remain, in some mysterious fashion, ‘landscapes’” (Gifkins 1988: 34). McCahon’s landscapes are, however, like those to which Geoffrey Hill also refers, landscapes that are ‘like revelation’ (Hill 1985:185; see also Malpas 2012b). They are, moreover, landscapes that draw attention to their own character *as revelatory*. Indeed, what is brought to appearance here is the revelation – the opening – of space, of landscape, of place.

9. The rhetoric of fluidity and virtuality that is nowadays so commonplace is a rhetoric largely driven by the supposed effects of contemporary technology – it is this same technology that supposedly breaks down boundaries, erases distinctions between places, and transforms everything into elements within a single interconnected network. It is thus that technology is taken radically to alter the character of contemporary space and place – and so also to alter the character of contemporary landscape. Yet place does not come after technology, but the other way round: technology is itself always placed, operating in and through place, always subject to the determinations of place. It is thus the structure of place, and so of landscape too, that shapes contemporary technology. Even forms of fluidity and virtuality appear only in relation to specific places and forms of place. If it is common to suppose otherwise, then this is partly because the *hubris* of technology itself leads to the misconstrual of that which is effective *upon* technology as an effect produced *by* technology. Technology does not change place in any radical or fundamental fashion, and the phenomena of fluidity and virtuality do not themselves constitute genuine alterations in the constitution of place or landscape. Technology itself changes, as do modes of action and interaction of the sort that might be associated with the fluidity and virtuality, but place is changed only in terms of the manner in which it is now represented and understood, and so, perhaps, in its very *visibility*. The assumption that place and landscape are indeed radically changed by contemporary technologies is itself part of the mode of self-presentation of those technologies – a mode of self-presentation that is directly tied to the way they are intermeshed with structures of commodification, consumption, and corporate capitalism. The structure of landscape and place, and the understanding of fluidity as itself tied to the dynamic character of place, implies an essential finitude and boundedness (even though it also gives rise to the unbounded). The fluid and the virtual, as well as spatiality itself, arise only within those same bounds. Those bounds are what ground the very possibility of appearance, the very opening of landscape – and of place – into world. It is this towards which both Heidegger and Simmel direct our attention, and which McCahon lays bare in the illumination of canvas and of paint.

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