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Over the Water: Glimpses into a Timescape

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Abstract

Above the waters wanders the spirit of the times, blowing the whirling bustle of modern life into being and drifting across the water's surface, a wavelet of modernity. The mirror of the lake ripples. The sky is reflected in the water, and the water reflects the sky. At the point where sky and water touch lies the looking-glass of the planes of time. In it are days past, present and yet to come, layered into a cultural fabric, an entwined garland of moments. A photograph – a light picture – is a window into a timescape. A word picture is an attempt to interpret the view of existence that opens up from that window. An attempt that needs a pictorial language, as well as a language picture. A metaphor is also an essential verbal tool. The investigative gaze should reach into the core of being. It is not enough just to see the outer shell. Intuition and poetry go hand in hand. They paint a flawless picture of the object being observed, which is a prerequisite for interpreting and understanding. It also means a glimpse from home, a look out from the home. Attachment to hearth and home clarifies the homeward glimpse, how we look into that home. The tourist's eye is incapable of that, not going beyond the surface. The home-glimpsed Varkaus is a multifaceted place. Glimpsed by a visitor, Varkaus is a mere backdrop, a one-dimensional existential prop. Across the waters, you can hear the humming throb of the factory. It means the hubbub of modern times. It is that buzz of existence that this expedition is seeking – and in the process of finding.

Keywords: timescape; investigative gaze; intuition; culture; poetry

Motto

"Sunset. The evening sun still glows in the southern sky and tinges the clouds with a dark purple. Beneath them a yellow streak shimmers, the trunks of the pine trees radiate a beautiful reddish-brown, the distant sandy beach gleams like gold. The shaded land beside the narrows is a deep blue, the rocky crag at its mouth glinting with blue-red light. In the western sky there is a creamy yellow belt of cloud, in the canopy of the most blue-green forest there lingers a faint glimmer as if exhausted by

the dazzling of the day: the sun is setting in the northwest as if into a fire. All these shades gather as pastel colours in the still waters, with pale streaks here and there like silver threads. With every blink of the eye, the shimmering shifts – there is no more delicate mirror than a lake, it is like the human soul. Now a red and white rowing boat enters the sunset glow, from it the sound of singing is to be heard – it is in the midst of gold and yellow like the boat of the blessed bound for the Islands of the Blessed."

- Pohjanpää, *Song of a summer night*, 1937

Beyond the open water

A man sits on the shore and looks out towards the opposite shore. Or he is working and at the same time sees across the open water to the other shore. Presumably he is also thinking about something. Perhaps then a person's thoughts are about everyday things.

Does a person see the same place differently at different times? What are all the factors that influence the content of an observation? Does each period produce a person who looks like that period? What can photographs tell us about the situation?



Photograph 1. Time between wars.



Photograph 2. The present of the 1970s.

In his book *Suunta ja tie* (The direction and the path), Professor J. E. Salomaa wrote interestingly about cultural education or education into culture. Of course, there is always a simultaneous growing process, which could perhaps sometimes be called embedding or rooting. Salomaa explores the subject in great depth: 'Education is, by its very nature, always about educating into a culture. Therefore, the current aims of education can only be sought in the cultural tasks of one's own time and one's own people [- -] On the other hand, it can also be said that the people itself is partly a product of its culture. For a nation and people is not just something that exists, but is obviously something that develops, that flourishes with its culture. When a nation is complete, it has already played its part on the stage of history.' (Salomaa, 1942, pp. 23 and 24.)

I wonder whether the people in photograph one thought that our Finnish nation was now ready. If they did indeed reflect on such a question, I wonder what it all could mean? A thorough examination of the matter would seem to require a further brief quotation from Salomaa's work mentioned earlier. The view that the nation is ready needs further clarification: "The dependence of the goal of education on time and a people, and therefore its changeability is ultimately due to the fact that growing up as a human being is always the same as being brought up into a culture. Culture, on the other hand, is temporal, historical. It is a historical event that can be seen from the present when looking at the past. There is no such thing as a culture without history. Culture is in a constant state of evolution." (Salomaa, 1942, pp. 22–23.)

In both pictures, Huruslahti Bay is a gleaming stretch of open water. Its shores and frozen ice surface were the scene of evil deeds during the 1918 Civil War. The present moment in photograph one, however, is from the decades that followed, the year 1936. Despite the Berlin Olympics, Europe was already heading for another world conflagration. Yet this probably did not disturb the laundry washing and fishing going on in the picture. Daily life probably continued to glide onwards as before. (For a discussion of the problem of time and place, see e.g. Itkonen, 2010; 2018; 2019; 2020a; 2020b.)

In photograph two a time jump has been made, leaping over the war years of the 1930s and the days of reconstruction. The present in the photo is the 1970s, the year 1975. It was the era of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and President Urho Kekkonen. Leftism was very much at the forefront. Even the Cold War was still ongoing. The fashionable expression of the spirit of the times seemed to be Finlandization. Despite everything, the atmosphere of everyday life seemed to be full of hopefulness and a bright belief in the future.

Interpretation would seem to require some kind of direct lived experience rather than mere reasoning. In order to find out what people were thinking, talking and dreaming about, it is necessary to examine the matter in a particular way. The philosopher Henri Bergson's ideas on ways of perceiving reality could be applied to our deliberations. Bergson argues that intuition can originate in the external world.

What is essential, therefore, is the realisation that reason can only offer fragments of an object. Intuition, on the other hand, achieves the whole. In examining a photograph from the past, mere knowing would reveal only disconnected details of everyday life that only reflect an outer shell. An intuitive gaze, on the other hand, would reach directly into the core of a bygone landscape, into its inner heart. Then the different dimensions of time would merge into one another. Only in this way could the overall picture of the milieu be seen, in which the environment and the buildings would merge into a harmonious whole. In that moment, each interpreter's Varkaus would be born, a Varkaus which no one else could find to be exactly the same. (See especially Salomaa, 1924, p. 151.)

Bergson also states that then intuition "is consulted", i.e., required, when the essence of an object is to be attained, "its heart". In this case, that object would be a water-filled timescape, Varkaus as it once was. To deepen our understanding, a concrete example is needed. In 1939, the Warkauden Lehti newspaper published the following advertisement: "The miracle bed? A double bed with night and day legs! 8 night legs, 4 day legs. Not a miracle at all, but the Heteka 37. In addition to the usual castors, the inner bed has rubber feet to protect the floor and keep the bed firmly in place. Plus other structural innovations! Discover the new, patented HETEKA 37!" (WL, 13.5.1939; see also especially Salomaa, 1924, p. 151.)

The spring of 1939 certainly did not just disappear from people's minds. It must have lingered on in their thoughts even in the 1970s, when photograph two was taken. Simple reason alone allows us to do some preliminary work in gaining an overall picture of the significance of the Helsinki Steel Furniture Co. (Helsingin Teräshuonekalutehdas Osakeyhtiö), or Heteka Co., in people's everyday lives. Since then, the word 'heteka', spelt with a lower case initial, has become established as a generic name. Similarly, the bed itself became part of everyday life and of the home's existential landscape. When writing a research study, the essayist needs Bergsonian intuition. There again, for the reader, intuition is essential for understanding the text. Back then, in the 1930s, when Varkaus was a market town of wooden buildings, people's everyday existence was strongly tied up with the prevailing general spirit of the times. Photograph one is a very powerful and evocative portrayal of all that which once was. Through intuitive empathic experiencing, the interpreter is at least able to peer into the heart of a bygone era. Left to his own reason, he is helplessly alone, and the past becomes a total silence. Storytelling comes to a standstill. (See e.g. Heteka, 2023; Salomaa, 1924, p. 151; Seppovaara, 2004, pp. 151–152.)

In a timescape

It seems as if the noise of the factories was carrying from the background across the open water. Presumably it was the rumbling roar of people working and earning a living, a noise which also meant certainty and confidence in the continuation of day-to-day existence. It is tempting to think that the people in the pictures were also aesthetes, because they lived in the midst of a milieu without contradictions.

Perhaps they really did represent the aesthetic type of person that Eino Sormunen, the first bishop of the Kuopio diocese and essayist, wrote about in his book *The Sources of Finnish Culture* (*Suomalaisen kulttuurin lähteille*) His philosophical characterisation also arouses the interest of the contemporary reader: "The human of the aesthetic type does not seek truth or profit, but intuitively lives into phenomena, into their 'immediate and pure emotional value'. This immediacy manifests itself, for example, in the fact that the aesthetic human does not move with unclear concepts, but with vivid and colourful images. Aestheticism is also pure in the sense that a certain pleasurable and erotic quality, which, as we know, is often associated with poor or decadent art, is anything but aesthetic; closer to aestheticism is the sublime and sacred world of a religious approach. The aesthete is characterised by a pantheistic religiosity; he imagines the whole of existence as living and sees in everything beautiful a reflection of primordial beauty." (Sormunen, 1942, pp. 75–76.) The photographer, at least, was an aesthete who was able to intuitively live into the timescape beauty of the place. The photographs were and still are full of reflections of home, of being at home, of primordial beauty.

The overall picture is beginning to be completed. Why can a particular place or landscape feel so close that the mere thought of losing it hurts? Is the place beautiful in itself or is it the feeling, the loving, that makes it beautiful? One answer to this question can be found in *Self-Education and the Art of Living* (*Itsekasvatus ja elämisen taito*), which was written by Juho Hollo, a philosopher and professor of adult education. His ideas are still inspiring: "We like beauty, it pleases us, it fills our being with a powerful feeling of pleasure. Is beauty perhaps a creation of love? Or is beauty the cause and reason for our love? Or is it that the prevailing interaction here is such that love creates beauty and beauty ignites love?" (Hollo, 1931, p. 94.)

Are the timescapes of the tourist and the permanent resident different? In other words, do the timescapes of the destination and the home differ? Are they perhaps viewed in different ways? Is there a rational and intuitive way of observing a landscape? It would then be possible to distinguish between a touristic observation and one of hearth and home. Would one of these then mean the observation of a rational person and the other the observation of an aesthete?

In both pictures, the factory breathes modernity. A person is looking at it from afar, from a distance. Does he see it as a mere provider of livelihood? Can the formal language of factory architecture be tied up with something of the corruption typical of decadent art? After all, Sormunen did mention pleasure and eroticism. I doubt anyone would associate anything like that with a factory silhouette.

Instead, the viewer might intuitively experience, live into, the 'immediate and pure emotional value' of a familiar domestic milieu. Presumably, they also want to see some benefit in it. What kind of reflection of primordial beauty might there be in photos one and two, then? Perhaps it implies an attachment to the home and to a secure everyday life. Does love of your home region make a landscape beautiful?

After all, then the tourist, the visitor, would not be able to perceive the same beauty. He would only see the shell of Varkaus, a timescape without an essence. The visitor would make observations with the eyes of a stranger, devoid of hearth and home. Therefore, there would be no reciprocity between the beauty of a landscape and love or affection.

A laundry washing place and a bench, both can mean the quotidien and the hyperquotidien, to which the ideals of action and rest are attached. In one present war still lies ahead, in the other already over. Even in the present moment of writing, in May 2023, war is raging in Ukraine. Always someone, somewhere, longs to return home. In a timescape there are several nested timescapes. In 1975, women are still doing their laundry: for them, 1936 is permanently the present. Now, in the 2020s a father and his daughters continue to sit on the bench. Thus is born the multitemporal Varkaus. The factory hums on through all the present moments.

The love of local homeland creates beauty in the landscape, and the beauty of the landscape brings about the love of local homeland. The process has probably been repeated in all three present moments. It is a question of manyness in sameness.

A person grows into a time and a culture. He is also brought up into them. To paraphrase Salomaa, quoted earlier, one could say that a person is a product of his own present time and homeplace. Each of us evolves and possibly also changes with our culture. But will any of us ever be completed? At least not a single one of us is without history.

Huruslahti was, is and will continue to be. The viewer and the factory are on opposite shores. Imagination wanders across the waters. Otherwise, it is impossible to move from one level of time to another. A photograph also functions as a recollection. It is also a photograph of a home region. Humanity's relationship with water has been ambivalent: sometimes indifferent and unappreciative, sometimes again respectful and caring. Fortunately, the direction of travel is still towards greater appreciation and, at the same time, wisdom. The dialogue between humanity and nature has thus become more profound. We have learned to listen to and respect the words of the Huruslahti homeland. (See, for example, Itkonen, 2009; 2015; 2021a; 2021b on the Varkaus essayism.)

Closing words

To complete the inquiry, to make it complete, we must try to respond to Lauri Pohjanpää's beautiful quotation. The spirit of the opening quotation is poetic. We must therefore at least strive for a similar tone. Otherwise the enchantment of the words will be broken, which is why the use of the 'I' form seems justified. In this way, the subject and the author are brought sufficiently close to each other. After all, philosophical essayistics approximates to poetry. Language runs above the water and crosses the open sea.

In me myself, I see glimpses of the sunsets of my grandparents' and my parents' summers. It's as if I carry inside me the ghost of the summer bells whose chimes reverberate across the lakes. It was a summer Sunday, a never-ending Sunday. Gone were the bustle and the anxiety. Peace and tranquillity prevailed. I felt a burning desire to be beside those still waters. They were days of dreams, overflowing with happiness. They were anti-everyday, too: timeless and unchangingly permanent. Let the following poem be a tribute to the existential summers of three generations:

A man looks into a window pane,

A boy stares back.

One of them, a future that has past.

and the other, a past still to come.

The son of summers, straw and copper,

still building his days.

A man of memory,

melancholy in his moments.

Reflection fades,

melts into nothingness.

The boy disappears,

sinks into a man.

He is alone

and full of boy.

Like back then sometime,

on the first pages of being.

English translation by Glyn Hughes

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