

Chapter 13

Europe as Ideal Landscape: A View on *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* of Pieter Brueghel the Elder

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter displays an ideal landscape of Europe by interpreting the painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* from Pieter Brueghel the Elder, giving hint to a constellation of concepts that circumscribe the European identity through the poetic metaphor of the Western World as the archipelago of the sunset referring at the same time to a constellation of Ancient Greek myth, which represents the basic tales of Europe conceived as a geopolitical, linguistic, and cultural problem. However, it acquires a deeper connotation and meaning if it is looked from a metaphorical point of view, considering Europe as an ideal landscape with a peculiar mood or disposition. Europe as a cultural identity consolidated since Renaissance, along the maritime explorations and the emergence of the concept of landscape, which developed from the fields of painting and literature into the scientific description of different world regions up to a new philosophical discipline called the philosophy of landscape.*

“The ideas live in the cavities between what things claim to be and what they are. Utopia would be above identity and above contradiction; it would be a togetherness of diversity.” (ADORNO 1973: 150)

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Talking about cultural identity we probably recur first on languages or dialects, religious and moral convictions, traditional techniques, myth and historical occurrences, political directions or to a specific land as a geographical territory. In this meaning, the land could be understood as a nation with more or less permeable borders, as a region or district of this nation and also as a city or a village in the region on the countryside surrounded by forests, fields, lakes, mountains or whatever appears, as a so called ‘natural phenomenon’, near beside the cultural manifestation of man. When we ask now about the cultural identity, not of a whole nation but before of each human being, we have to go the opposite way, initiating the fundament of cultural identity in a village or city where each of us raised up, in the root, or in an phenomenological term, in the ground [Boden] where we all experienced the first time the indistinguishable and inseparable difference between *nature* and *culture*, where we experienced as a embodied being a specific space with a specific structure of time, with specific light, tastes, forms and colours, normally called homeland and which I want to call currently *landscape*. We all come from landscapes, including cities and villages as parts of them, and even if we are nomads, who we all are for sure, we depend physically or psychologically more to one specific landscape then to another.

The concept of landscape in a philosophical context, as a geo-philosophical term, is quite modern, but the notion of *landscape* appears long before with the German, Flemish and Italian paintings of the XV century and one of the earliest notes comes from Albrecht Dürer when he writes in 1521, in his diary from the journey to the Netherlands, about Joachim Patinier as the good painter of landscapes, the “gut landschafft mahler” [DÜRER 1956: 169]. Patiniers paintings of landscapes influenced Pieter Brueghel the Elder, one of the first European painters who dedicated their work primarily to the painting of original Flemish landscapes inspired by an obligate journey to Italy, which means, by the landscapes of southern Europe. Bruegel painted a lot of landscapes but the only landscape which is related to a Greek myth, is the painting *The Fall of Icarus* which exemplarily demonstrates the relation between landscape and the cultural identity of Europe. This painting can be denominated as *ideal landscape*, as a creation of an inexistent region which concentrates several symbols around the mythical tale from *The Fall of Icarus* and makes a direct citation of the mythical narration from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* giving their an ironic and also tragic and very personal interpretation. It can be also called as a vision of the cosmos, or a world view, where the sky, the earth, the mountains, the rivers and the sea are in one composition together with the work of men, transmitting an ethical, moral and philosophical message, reconsidering that Bruegel was not only a portraitist of his time and of the nature of his time but also recognized as an philosophic painter, as an painter with a critical view and a painter with a certain philosophical intention. But what has this picture, apart from the fact that it is a picture from a European painter, to do with the imagination of Europe? When we look at *The Fall of Icarus* we see a bay with dispersed islands, with embarking and outgoing ships, with a harbour and a maritime city where the houses reflect the light of the red sunset on their roofs, an archipelago maybe, big mountains on the seashore and capes and white strands in the distance of the horizon open to the indefinite ocean. But on the first plan, beside all the maritime atmosphere, we can see a farmer or a peasant who furrows a field and a pastor surrounded by his shepherd, one contemplates the earth concentrated on his work and the other contemplates the sky, maybe with stoical patience, maybe for another reason, and we see also a fisherman who doesn’t imports the person which drowns in the water in front of him, or, in more interpretive words, who is not imported nether of the drowning of the myth nor of the appearance of new powerful ship, a warship of new times which points, with full sails, directly to a mysterious island, a ruin or a temple, labyrinth or cavern in the same bay near the shepherd of the pastor. Further we find in the picture of Brueghel not only the myth of the Fall of Icarus but also the myth of *Europe*, because *Icarus* is intimately connected

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with the entire mythological tale of Europe where, when we consider the different protagonist, we realize central characteristics of our culture. The myth of *Europe* and Europe as the land of the sunset, appears in a strange form in the picture from Brueghel, showing the myth of the falling *Icarus* in a world subjugated by the logos, because in his genealogical constellation we see also his father *Daedalus*, the King of Crete *Minos*, the *Minotaur*, *Theseus*, *Ariadne* and *Dionysus*. In the psyche of *Europe* appears her origin from Asia, her violent autonomy, the foundation of the mercantile system by *Minos*, the spirit of the technique and the perverted intellect represented by *Daedalus*, the labyrinth with *Ariadne*, *Theseus* and the monster *Minotaur*, as a symbol for the lost in the inventions and the monstrosity of the will, the memory, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, and referring again to *Icarus* – the sacrifice of the sons for the hubris of their fathers. Beside all this we need to remember here the etymology of the word *Europe*, descending from the Phoenician word *ereb* [NIMER 2005: 518] which means *evening* and *sunset* and when we see Europe from the East to the West, we see a cape, an archipelago and the *finisterrae* where the sun disappears. In this sense the German word *Abendland* brings Europe nearer to the elements of the landscape, like the land of the sunset, or the land of the evening, the land of the shadows, what refers directly to the poetic content of Europe as an imagined space, as a land situated between midday and midnight. We don't need necessarily recur to so called postmodern philosophers to see the connection between landscape and Europe, but also Jean-Luc Nancy mentions in his text *Uncanny Landscape* the upcoming of the idea or notion of landscape in time with the consolidation of the idea of Europe and as a consequence of fundamental changes in the arts and sciences. Landscape, as Nancy puts it, "can be neither theological nor political, neither economic nor moral. It appears in history, in a very precise manner, at the moment when these different registers of meaning are changing, to the point of overturning the entire order of landmarks in the European world – and this is perhaps also the very birth of Europe." (NANCY 2005: 59). This is why the *landscape* must be considered here as a methodological term and the *landscape* from *The Fall of Icarus* as an example how Europe can be shown not only as connection between languages, cultures and economic interests but much more as a disposition, as a poetic and philosophical space where the constellation of several symbols and metaphors create a typical atmosphere and cultural identity called Europe, or in more metaphorical words, the occident, the place where the sun goes under.

The connection between poetry and philosophy is one of the fundamental sources of world experience in the occident and it's a common sense that also the natural sciences, the hard knowledge or pure experience are based on poetic inspiration, on unexpected occurrences and that there is no strict distinction between *experientia vaga* and *experientia ordinata*, between a random experience and a systematic and organized experience. It's rather contrary that the poetic and vagabonded experience can be considered as the fundament of all other experiences and this conviction we find for example in the works of the Portuguese writer Teixeira de Pascoaes (1877-1952) and the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), seeing the first like a poet with philosophical tendencies and the second like a philosopher with poetic skills. Both of them have also received a nearly equally attribution, on one site the peasant poet and on the other site the peasant thinker, the poet and the thinker of the ground, of the fields and the pathways [HENNRICH 2014]. The word *peasant*, which has the same root like the French word *paysage*, the Italian word *paesotto* and the Portuguese word *paisagem* points directly to the landscape, to the poet and the thinker of landscapes. The poetry of the Portuguese writer Teixeira de Pascoaes is totally saturated with the physical space and the geography of his homeland or landscape in the northern part of Portugal and the same we can say from the work of Martin Heidegger, reading for example the short philosophical text "The field path" where we find hidden in a walk through the landscape of the

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Black Forest in the south of Germany the whole philosophical space of his ontology. The experience of the landscapes in Europe as a walked experience describes as well Georg Steiner in his essay *The Idea of Europe*. For him Europe was mainly constructed by foot and hand and he underlines that there exists an essential connection between the European humanity and their landscapes, citing a lot of other poets, philosophers and painters like Kant, Kierkegaard, Monet or Van Gogh. (STEINER 2015) It's furthermore not very erroneous to consider the term *experience* and the term *progress* as two of the main concepts of western civilization, interpreting them before all as the *scientific experience* and the *scientific and economic progress*. But in this meaning, there are only derived from a more fundamental sense of experience, reading for example the German word *Erfahrung*, which has a more dynamic and physically connotation. *Erfahrung* means originally *to perambulate* and it is for this reason a dynamic concept, including a process and a progress not only in an empirical but before in physical kinetic way. Experience is necessarily *kynesis*, is movement and, in the words of Edmund Husserl necessarily the regress to the *Lebenswelt*, to the living environment (HUSSERL 1939: 38), what as well Maurice Merleau-Ponty reinterprets in his *Phenomenology of Perception* when he says: "To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side [paysage] in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is." (MERLEAU-PONTY 2005: X) Experience is, before all, the experience of a space but this space is not an abstract category like Kant mentioned the space, it is more than this a embodied space and inhabited space where the human being perceives the phenomenon's by per passing the space and changing the viewpoints, by reading the physiognomic of the so called *nature*, discovering their appearances and braving through the immanent to another scale of sense, or in a metaphysical term, to the truth. There is a fundamental connection between some main concepts of the Greek philosophy, like *physis* (nature), *kynesis* (movement), *metabolé* (change), *phainómenon* and *phainestai* (appearance, appear), *legein* and *logos* (reading and language), *aisthesis* (perception), *ousia* (being) and *aletheia* (what is not being hidden, or truth) and this terms are related in different ways to each other but more in a linear way. The revelation of the truth is not only in Heidegger's fundamental ontology, but in a big part of European continental philosophy a way of truth, a movement and a permanent change where the language, the poetic word, reveals, what is hidden, by setting it poetically in work. The poet don't reaps the truth out of the *nature* like the peasant reaps the potatoes from the earth but he discloses what is hidden with his whole poetic capacity, through the exceptional experience of the landscape, of the fields and forests, or in modern poetry, by strolling through the stoned agglomerations of the city's. The poet doesn't denominate but he lances the sense and the language is the reiteration of the movement. Important by this linear interpretation of the concepts is there relation to the phenomenology, the hermeneutics and the ontology enlightening the complex configuration between the *phenomenon*, the *point of view* and the *perception of sense*; the *reading*, the *interpretation* and the *understanding* and the notion of *being and truth*, the notion that there is more than apparently exist, the notion of the difference between the visible and the invisible and the notion that the visible is constellated around a absent centre.

The core of the ideal landscape of what we call Europe, is nether visible nor material and it is as well not identical but it can be described like an atmosphere, a mood or a tune which surrounds like a sound, sometime lower, sometimes higher, the geographical space of the land of the sunset. This atmosphere seems to appear ostensibly out of the historical circumstances, traditional practices, religions or whatever is manifested as a cultural knowledge or cultural technique. But without to abnegate this fact and that the picture of *The Fall of Icarus* is mostly composed with some of these main symbols of European culture,

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I intend to point on concepts which connect the idea of the sunset landscape more poetically with the ontology. Imagining another landscape of the occident without the direct presents of cultural traces like a deep forest on the seashore and mountains with caverns at the afternoon, maybe when the sun is nearly disappearing on the red coloured horizon and when the white moon and the stars appears slowly in the dark blue sky, directs us maybe deeper to some main ontological concepts. The ontological difference, for example, between the being and the beings, is to consider as scissure or split in an existential mode, but also as the scissure between the light and the dark, the endless and the end. And the twilight as well, where the schemes and shadows of the phenomenon's get a strange connotation, where the things appear in an unusual manner, where the silence or the sounds of the wind whistles inaudibly the enigmas of the landscape and where the whole atmosphere reflects our inner disposition in contrast to our superficial daily lives. (HOERES 2004: 224). Poetry is not only the source of ontology, but it is more than this, ontology. The Greek terms *aisthesis* and *poesis* are directly appointing on the term *aletheia* and the poetic experience assumes out of the *physis* or what we can also call *landscape*. Europe is more than a unit of economic interests and historical coincidences; it's the reveal of a specific disposition, the poetic expression of an ontological experience.

This poetic landscape, or more exactly, this ideal landscape created by poetic language and expressed in specific terms and metaphors is hereby the source of inspiration and the origin of what I would like to call *European Thinking* and the term *Ideal Landscape* is hereby not mentioned in the sense of stilted landscapes in where the ideal construction and composition of the painter tries to generate a beautiful and sublime view on the nature with some ancient ruins and idyllic or bucolic messages. Ideal Landscape means the landscape where the idea, here of Europe, is represented without a direct identification, where the landscape can be understood as a *plane of immanence* where the different concepts are related to each other. The concepts occupy and populate the plane, part for part, while the plane is the undivided milieu where the concepts are spread out without to disturb her continuity and completeness [DELEUZE/GUATTARI 1995]. If we consider Deleuze as one of the philosophers of the non-identical (das Nichtidentische) we see his *plane of immanence* as an interpretation and conversion of the *constellation* concept from Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, where the idea is saved without an identification and where the identity is saved in the different. On the picture *The Fall of Icarus* do not only appear some basic elements or concepts of the European Culture – the sunset, the sea, the maritime city, the trader ships and the warships, the archipelago, the ruins or the temple, the fields, the shepherd, the fisherman, the peasant, the shadows etc. – but also the onto-theological discourse which is still in question, the step from the mythos to the logos and the return to the mythos. Here one must see the landscape as a set of elements, an aesthetic space in which the different signs are grouped within a constellation, which are also multidimensional metaphors and which evoke an intuition of a central meaning, of an unidentified identity or of a non-conceptual. Now the concept of the constellation will then be a first methodological term to decipher Brueghel's picture and that was properly inserted in the modern philosophical discourse by Benjamin, who in the introduction of his study *The Origin of German Trauerspiel* questions the problem of representation in philosophy, differentiating between the mere scientific deduction of concepts and whose capitalization in the sense that a major capital of knowledge is also the most true and, on the other hand, the search and exposure of ideas, through a grouping of concepts, which by themselves represent the phenomena. "The set of concepts operating in the presentation of an idea makes that idea manifest as a configuration of concepts. For phenomena are not incorporated in ideas. They are not contained in them. [...] Ideas are to things as constellations to stars. This is to say, first of all: they are neither their concepts nor their laws. [...] Ideas are eternal constellations, and inas-

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much as the elements are grasped as points in such constellations, the phenomena are simultaneously divided out and saved” (BENJAMIN 2019: 10-11). Theodor W. Adorno later takes up, in the second part of his *Negative Dialectics*, the concept of the constellation not only to question this possibility of philosophical representation but above all for a critique of totalitarianism and of the identifying thinking. He follows Benjamin but focuses on his analysis of the concept of the constellation referring also to Max Weber who “explicitly rejected the delimiting procedure of definition, the adherence to the schema *genus proximum, differentia specificata*, and asked instead that sociological concepts be “gradually composed” from “individual parts to be taken from historic reality. The place of definitive conceptual comprehension cannot, therefore, be the beginning of the inquiry, only the end.” (ADORNO 1973: 165) Any attempt to reveal an idea, in our case the idea of Europe and the West, cannot diverge from the thought of the non-identical or from the discursive criticism against the totalitarian and identifying thinking. The concept of the constellation, but also the concept of the *trace*, we think here of Jacques Derrida, is one of these concepts that makes it possible to think something like Europe without opposing the concept of the East to the concept of the West and without including the East in the space of the West. Thinking about something without identifying it, without following the imperative “This is” does not seem an easy task, especially when talking about such a dominating cultural space as Europe. But the objective here would be to save an idea that can be considered the essence of the West, a hunch of something European, but not an ideology that does not accept the opposition, much less, that does not accept the decline of itself to open space to something different and this is not in the sense that the different, the negative of the negative, is automatically a positive. The target would be to remain in an infinite decline, which contemplates a sun that is eternally a setting sun. The concept of the constellation is thus for the present work a first term of a critique of knowledge that helps to cover the last term, Europe, which apparently seems so clear, but only when we speak of a geographical, political and economic space, but not of a lived space, where diverse experiences and mentalities emerge through a fundamental and unifying sonority or tonality, which I want to explain now with the concept of the fundamental disposition widely introduced in philosophy by Martin Heidegger, especially in his interpretation of Friedrich Hölderlin’s Hymns “Germania” and “The Rhine”. The second methodological key for deciphering Europe as a twilight landscape and in connection with the methodological concept of the constellation, the term of the disposition, clarifies very well what is at issue here and which can be revealed deductively. The concept of disposition, tonality or consonance, in German *Stimmung*, already appears before Heidegger in Georg Simmel’s well-known essay *Philosophy of Landscape*. But while in Simmel the disposition is mainly an aesthetic term, the term of the fundamental disposition, in German *Grundstimmung*, it is in Heidegger an existential term. The experience of a landscape is always related to an individual affectivity, but how one can differentiate between generalization and the individual universal? The concept of generalization refers negatively to a simplification or standardization of experience, while the individual universal springs from a process of historical sedimentation, which includes for us in the first place not only the great events of history but above all the poetic sedimentation of human experience and its experience with nature, nature understood as *ousia*, being of the being and thus also the being of man. Tonality as a mere feeling is temporarily punctual and particular. On the contrary, there is a fundamental disposition explainable through poetic landscapes, through the work of art and in our context through a painted landscape, which shows a universal, which reveals, through a constellation of concepts, this essence or idea, this non-identical which is the real identification point of European culture, charged with a task that seems to be a paradox but that appears as an inevitable destination of this twilight landscape. And here we need to take a deep breath of fundamental ontology. Pieter Brueghel’s

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painting is not only a twilight and European landscape, it is also the portrait of a discourse that four hundred years later Martin Heidegger resumed with his criticism of the technicism and mercantilism of the modern spirit, contrasting it with metaphors and poetic images of the same but abandoned European culture, like the peasant who furrows the land and the shepherd who keeps his flock, and despite several other elements the loss of the gods. When we read the painting as a work of art and not as a mere representation of Brueghel's time, when we read it as a work of truth and in a sense of a reading of fundamental ontology, as Heidegger does in his text *The Origin of the Work of Art*, we find several central figures of his thought that describe the relationship of man with being and also the fallen gods or the fleeing gods. When we read Brueghel's picture with Heidegger, Heidegger asserts himself with Brueghel and Brueghel becomes a universal interpreter of modernity and European culture. In the painting *The Fall of Icarus* not only do the basic elements of this culture appear - the sunset, the sea, the maritime city, the ship, the archipelago, the ruin, the countryside, the flock, the war, the shadows - but also the onto-theological discourse that is still at stake, the journey from myth to logos and the turn of logos to myth, or to put it another way, the step from the gods to god and his abandonment and the return of the gods later of the time of the absence of god. But which, after showing some elements in your constellation, is the fundamental disposition that arises here and that can be considered as the fundamental disposition of Europe? The fundamental disposition is a central term of Heidegger's philosophy and appears in his philosophy in various circumstances but always as something fundamental or even original, even of philosophy itself, for example in his lectures "Basic Questions of Philosophy. Selected "Problems" of "Logic"" from 1937/38, where he designates, for example, the term of astonishment as a fundamental disposition, or the term *Verhaltenheit*, which is in German something like relationship and retention at the same time, "terror of what is closest and most obtrusive, namely that beings are, and awe in the face of what is remotest, namely that in beings, and before each being" (HEIDEGGER 1994: 4).

The fundamental disposition is the experience of ontological difference and as an experience of separation and difference, it appears through the constitutive and constellated elements of the twilight landscape understood as a unifying space. As the constellation reveals through the mediation of the different elements, the constellation points, a hidden and unspeakable idea, the fundamental disposition touches the different elements and reveals a unique atmosphere of the place of contemplation. But like the constellation, the fundamental disposition is never explained by a single concept or a single name. To name the fundamental disposition with a single name is only an attempt to explain this silent voice of being. The fundamental disposition refines the being-there and thus thinking as the project of truth in word and concept, but to limit the experience of the fundamental disposition to a single name would be a deviation and only an opinion on this truth. It has several names but for this reason it is not simple, on the contrary, it shows its affluence and its strangeness. Even so, I intend to expose now one of the designations of this fundamental provision that is very close to an alleged fundamental provision of this European landscape. In his text on Hölderlin's hymn *Germania*, Heidegger designates the fundamental disposition as sacred mourning and we can find this consonance or this fundamental disposition not only in several paintings by Brueghel but also in paintings by Caspar David Friedrich, Arnold Böcklin and Otto Dix and in many more poets and painters from the land of twilight, from the landscape of Europe, be they Renaissance, romantic, modern or contemporary painters like Anselm Kiefer. The fundamental disposition of Hölderlin's poetry is for Heidegger in the hymn *Germania* the mourning over the loss of the gods, a pain that is not just a sentimentality and also not a faint. This mourning is a lucid superiority of a great pain that is sacred because it is altruistic, out of all forms of usefulness, that does not want

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anything more and does not expect anything else. But this sacred sadness about the loss of the gods does not imply the abandonment of the divine. The gods, or demigods, left man and the world of man but the divine still works, because the man in mourning, despite being obliged to renounce the gods, I still keep them in his struggling heart. “The necessity of renouncing the gods of old, the enduring of this renunciation, is the preserving of their divinity [and no] longer wanting anything or asking anything of the gods does not mean decline into some crude form of godlessness or empty despair [because it is the] displacement into and maintaining oneself purely within the space of a possible new encounter with the gods” (HEIDEGGER 2014: 87-88). Instead of prophesying a decline in the afternoon earth in the way Oswald Spengler did, it will be necessary to accept and cultivate this late earth as an infinite afternoon from which springs an inexhaustible source of inspiration for a new dawn. What Heidegger writes about Hölderlin and the text “The homeland in decline” is in our business, nothing more and nothing less than a portrait of the West, of Europe that must face its twilight to be reborn again and how the afternoon earth is always in the face of this decline, it is forever the dawn of heralding. Europe is the afternoon land, the unfinished decline, but to finish I quote from the section “The Decline of the Fatherland as the Emergence of a New Unity of Nature and Humans” of Heidegger’s lectures *Hölderlin’s Hymns “Germania” and “The Rhine”*: “What is decisive in reflecting upon the decline is not the process of decline, but the emergence of a new unity, starting from which what existed hitherto is comprehended as dissolving itself. The decline is therefore a historically distinctive moment, one that can extend over a century, because here the unexhausted — the inexhaustible that belongs to the new commencement, the possible — can bring itself to power, granted that those human beings are there who are capable of experiencing in advance this inexhaustibility of the possible as such: of founding it, of knowing it, and of bringing it about” (HEIDEGGER 2014: 110).

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