The Modern Rural

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There is no way of speaking about the urban without automatically conjuring its opposite, the rural. It can be said that the rural is the urban unconscious, that which the urban rejects, the great outdoors. There is nothing strange about this. The urban is merely a fold in nature, a state of exceptionality that began historically with physical demarcations (walls, gates, ditches, shrines) intended for protection and eventually becoming the seat of certain privileges and immunities (a more advanced form of protection). Binary concepts such as the urban and the rural perform as alternatives but also as complements. In his classic *The Country and the City,* Raymond Williams observed the tendency to reduce the historical manifestations of this opposition to abstract symbols and to give them a psychological or metaphysical status. Much 19th- and early 20th-century literature set up images intended to convey suprahistorical values that were, in effect, rooted in the history of social organization and management of the territory. Renewed interest in non-urban spaces, from border studies to concern with bioregions and the study of landscapes is in all probability a phase in the long history of this dialectical pair. Williams believed that the persistence of certain ideas and forms through periods of change revealed the existence of some permanent need, one that is, however, created by historical processes (89). The new ruralism is not a new modality of nostalgia for a lost paradise, but a turn in the history of this dialectical pair

brought about by large-scale processes that represent an acute phase of the social and economic phenomena underlying Williams's observations. As it is approached in this book, the new ruralism is not synonymous with the late nineteen sixties movement of "return to nature" known in Catalonia as "neoruralisme", or with the slightly later emergence of rural cinema in France, precisely at the time when peasants were suffering the slow and painful attrition of their traditional way of life. It is at this point, Christian Bosséno observes, that "neoruralism begins to embellish the scene. Literature, cinema, commercialism in all forms take hold of the last peasants of yore, of their houses, their customs, their memories, their family pictures, to make money – a lot of money – but also to bear witness" (16). This sociological form of neoruralism arose in order to sing a paean to a dying way of life – in effect to a culture – transforming its agony into a repertoire of images that banked on the exotic moment. In 1970s Catalonia the back to the land movement – neoromantic in character – was a naïve attempt on the part of city youth to graft itself onto the old peasant stock. These phenomena, quixotic or commercial, were only a part of the ampler phenomenon this book seeks to understand, one that can be described, perhaps optimistically, as the return of a social consciousness of the dignity and importance of the non-urban.

The epistemological privileging of the city since the19th century correlates with the clustering of industry in towns, which exacerbated the urban concentration of wealth and thus of markets, labor, administration, and education, conditions that necessarily implied a periphery of dependent territory that supplied the raw elements, both material and human. Later, postindustrial cities relied on obsolete concepts of modernization to retain, and whenever possible, intensify the capitalization of resources in urban centers. Deprived of their traditional economic engine, cities now found themselves in a situation similar to that of the agricultural community subjected to extreme capitalization. The proletarian masses of the earlier 20th century were now as disposable and unnecessary as the masses of peasants and journeymen had become when agriculture was mechanized and ceased to be a labor-intensive way of life. But if the surplus of the rural population could be displaced to the cities and employed in factories, urban masses trapped in mandatory leisure could not be shipped back to the country. Capitalism is unable to reverse the processes that it sets in motion. It understands economic growth only in the form of reckless exploitation of non-renewable resources, and it is only slowly dawning on observers that the country and its basic form of habitation, the rural com-

munity as the historically most enduring resource of capitalist "development", is reaching the point of exhaustion. Because the misuse of this fundamental precondition of urban life has been experienced predominantly as cultural struggle (one with a predictable outcome), its devastating consequences have remained hidden for a long time. Who could resist modernity and oppose, in the name of traditional forms of community, the direction of history that was blessed with the conveniences of progress?

In the late seventies, as the industrial organization of society began to disappear from the West, cities were re-signified as centers of consumption. Culture, long an urban privilege, was commodified so as to take up the economic slack caused by delocalized industrial activity. The myth of the city as creative center presupposed a perennially lagging village, the provincial backwater of so much 19th-century literature. This myth neglected the economic truth that peasant frugality – a condition of economic survival – made education a dispensable luxury from which only the landowner and, to some extent, the merchant and professional class (the doctor, pharmacist, veterinarian, notary public, schoolteacher, priest) benefited. In the second half of the twentieth century, the near simultaneous disappearance of the peasantry and the urban proletariat brought the traditional relation of rural society to the urban community to a crisis. Yet precisely at this time of dissolution of the inherited social forms, an unparalleled concentration of art and conference centers, universities and research facilities, libraries and archives, museums, galleries, theaters, multi-cinemas, and concert halls, the communications industry and publishing houses, cultural tourism, festivals, and a constant "production" of "events" supplied the livelihood of urbanites on an unprecedented scale.

If until the mid twentieth century the world was divided between industrialized and agricultural regions and countries, today culture is the strongest gauge for the relation of center to periphery. Current levels of capital concentration in the production of symbolic commodities have pushed the dichotomy of developed and undeveloped countries to a new limit represented by a hierarchy of urban centers of symbolic production. So-called world cities now appear detached from their countries, as denationalized nodes in a network of global cities disengaged from traditional notions of territory. With regard to this nodal system the rest of the world falls into a subsidiary role comparable to that of the 19th-century province in relation to the capital. Older centers of regional and even national importance fall into the vast provincial expanse of the new global cartographies, downgraded on the scale of informational significance until

they become virtually invisible. World culture expands by erasing former national cultures just as, at an earlier historical stage, national cultures spread by expunging regional cultures.

New ruralism refers to this vast eco-political territory rather than to romantic agrarian notions. And the question it raises is, formally, the same that Max Weber raised a century ago when he identified the social problem specific to the countryside in the following terms: "Whether and how the rural community or society, which no longer exists, can arise again so as to be strong and enduring" (363). Weber's formulation of the problem did not entail nostalgia for a bygone social form; it stemmed from an insightful reflection on the unequal results of the development of capitalism in specific societies under different conditions of land tenure, geographic accident, and political institutions. He understood that in Europe – in what he called "the old civilized countries" – the flare of capitalist competition fed a counter-current of conservative agrarianism. The backlash was triggered not by sentimental clinging to old life forms but by the use of the land as capital investment. By pushing up the price of land and the capital required for agricultural business, capitalism caused an increase in the number of renters of land, i.e., of idle landowners in contrast to traditional peasants, and it was these contrasting effects of capitalization of the land that according to Weber created the impression of a separate "rural society" (366-67). This "rural society" was based on cultural premises that were the opposite of traditional rural life. If the old agrarian order aimed to sustain the greatest possible number of people on a piece of land, capitalism seeks to produce as many crops as possible for the market with the smallest deployment of human labor, thus transforming self-sustaining economies into market economies. From this contrast ensued a cultural conflict of world-historical proportions, which Weber observed in its early formative stages: "The thousands of years of the past struggle against the invasion of the capitalistic spirit" (367).

Under the conditions set by triumphant capitalism, the question before us remains largely the same as Weber's: whether something like a rural society, or more precisely something that inherits modes of experience from a no-longer existing rural community can emerge from the wreckage of urban, i.e., capitalistic exploitation of the land. The answer, to the extent that we grope toward one, needs to take into account the cultural forms under which deep transformations of man's relation to the territory take place, and not only or even primarily the economic and infrastructural modifications of land use, which are often contingent on ingrained

sociocultural patterns of behavior. Weber's understanding of the culturally differentiated responses to capitalistic development in the American South and in the old countries of Europe and within the latter still holds for any theory of neorural social formations.

Today, over a century after Weber's essay on the sociology of rural life, the country's subjection to extreme conditions of profitability is manifest. What is meant by this is not only the industrialization of farming and the land's subsequent inability to support former demographic densities, but also the harnessing of the country's symbolic resources and the proliferation of a rural urbanism that upsets the traditional relation between the two concepts without surmounting their opposition. Williams' injunction "to ask not only what is happening, in a period, to ideas of the country and the city, but also with what other ideas, in a more general structure, such ideas are associated" (290), retains all its relevance, not least because the rural, as Michel Duvigneau remarked, is an embarrassing concept that sociology does not like to deal with (7) – perhaps because sociology developed alongside city studies. But from this refusal comes a severe misrepresentation of ruralism as mystique or ideology; thus the onus is on those who refuse the refusal to throw some light on the question whether forms of experience inherited from rural life are still possible in our time.

One idea the concept of the country is associated with is that of the landscape. So tight is their association that landscape today seems inherent to any notion of the rural. And yet the landscape is only as recent as the emergence of reflexivity as preeminent cultural factor. At the beginning of our era the *rus* inspired a good number of Roman writers but these were not interested in distilling aesthetic values from the land but pragmatically interested in the arts of husbandry. They catered to their readership, and agriculture was the backbone of the Roman republic. Cato's *De Re Rustica* and Varro's *Rerum Rusticarum Libri*, Virgil's *Georgics*, and the elder Pliny's *Natural History* are concerned with the preparation and plowing of the land, with the seed, irrigation, the seasons and pests; in short with the conditions of a successful yield and, indirectly, of a healthy state. The landscape arises much later as a consumable object in its own right – an object to be consumed visually, hence its pictorial importance. But with the thoroughgoing capitalization of the land, the landscape ends up losing its contemplative value and is now intertwined in promotional schemes that place the traditional exploitation of the rural on an altogether different footing.

If the classic form of value extraction was the centripetal removal of farm and forestry products and of labor force to the cities, today econom-

ic growth is elicited through a massive projection of city folks to the countryside for on-site consumption of "genuine" local products, the detoxification of sensory experience, and the creation of surplus value through parceling of the land for residential development and holiday colonies. This dynamic is driving the proliferation of communities of weekenders and retirees in villages throughout Provence, Roussillon and Empordà, with intensive exploitation of the landscape for the benefit of people who, not forming part of a rural community, only meet the traditional residents in the guise of service providers. Furthermore, unbridled transference to the country of infrastructure required by the great conurbations has led to a record increase in the consumption of land in the space of few years, and this development, as Joan Nogué observes, "has produced in a very short time an intense territorial fragmentation and landscape defacement that has questioned in depth the identity of many places" (276). There is nothing primordial or eternal about the identity of place, and Nogué does not bemoan change in itself. Identity has to do not so much with a static reality as with change that can be recognized and participated in by the human communities that live with and act on the features of place. Identity of place refers to a tempo and scale of transformation that goes hand in hand with the generational relay in a human community and can be absorbed through ordinary processes of social and personal adaptation. But to destroy a landscape, says Nogué, is quite different from transforming it. It is above all an ethical matter (279).

Alain Roger observes that the land is the zero degree of landscape (68). The landscape, according to him, is the result of "artification", that is, an aesthetic mediation of the primary reality of the land. One is reminded of the flexibility with which Josep Pla deploys the term "país", providing it with a pliable semantic range that allows him to articulate the immediacy of his experience in different contexts. "País" refers to a meaningful unit of social and territorial experience based on empirical – rather than ontological, not to say political – criteria. Roger believes that the appearance of the landscape depended historically on the fulfillment of two conditions. First the laicization (that is, demystification) of natural elements that had functioned as signs in sacred space, and then their aesthetic unification in painting, that is, in a framed space or "window" opening to the outside. Both conditions, detachment from mythology and unification through a viewing subject brought about the invention of perspective, which subjected the natural elements to a distancing representing the self-reflexivity of the observer. Self-reflexivity entailed separation from a pre-

vious relation to the land, the end of an intimacy that often conveyed the emotion of the holy. Such primordial experience, typical of the romantic sublime, predates the subject-object dichotomy. In *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto cites a passage from Ruskin's *Modern Painters* in which the art critic describes how in the landscape, independently of religious sentiment, he used to feel "the presence of a Great and Holy Spirit" (215). Romantic pantheism ran counter to the secularizing forces that were responsible for the appearance of the landscape as an aesthetic object. If the landscape is an extension of the garden and an appendix of the city that results from the taming and colonization of the country by urban life, as Camporesi believes (143), the romantics tried to reverse this relation by seeking an unmediated nature in which they could renew the tension between the protective effects of culture and the awe inspired by the natural forces. And yet the romantics remain among the greatest landscape devotees and originators. How is this paradox to be explained? Quite simply, through their emphasis on reflexivity. Their pantheism pointed away from the ancient world of theocentric symbols and to the sublime as subjective experience for which the external world is allegorical. Whether it be one of Caspar David Friedrich's figures looking into an abyss from on high or William Wordsworth on Mont Blanc, the romantic landscape is the expression of self-awareness, where the "self" is larger than the ego and the natural world a medium for the realization of the ego's cosmic insignificance. Notwithstanding the premium placed on spontaneity, romantic landscape is nature that has been cultured through and through.

"Culture" derives metaphorically from the cultivation of the land, a millennial technique for harnessing the earth's fertility to the ends of human evolution. Civilization, that is, the possibility of organized society or *civitas* that emerged with agriculture, not only guaranteed the permanence of human settlements but also promoted their internal complexity. Once it slid into metaphor, however, "culture" became detached from the land and through dialectical inversion ended up denoting its contrary. Broken up in the binarism of country and city, culture came to represent an abstract, free-floating category associated with "trends", "movements", and people in transit: performers, artists, lecturers, exhibitors who correlate with the global flow of capitals and commodities. Under the word's new semantic determination, the earth became material for the subject's internalized imperative to change. But the subject cannot change without effectively transforming its external references. Hence, since the advent of idealism, the liquidation of the physical world proceeds alongside the de-

struction of values slowly forged through the millennial relation of human communities to the features of the land. One does not have to partake of anything like "metaphysics against the city" (White: 21) to grant that value liquidation accelerates in cities and in the vast stretches of land sucked into the maelstrom of the urban process. Liquid life, Zygmunt Bauman's term for today's hyper individualism, refers to the instrumental appropriation of the world in the cause of self-reform (11). Such appropriation and the attendant extinction of all value except the instrumental explain why cities have ceased to incarnate the utopian ideals of a mankind bent on self-improvement. "Liquid life – writes Bauman – feeds on the self's dissatisfaction with itself" (11). If permanent dissatisfaction is the engine of change, its obverse is the retrofeeding drive to consume. Unbridled consumption feeds on the frustration it is expected to quench; it enhances dissatisfaction and stimulates desire by confusing subject and object in the reification of achievement.

Consumption and politics, the principal modes of urban action, underpin the city's hegemony as the privileged stage of a humanity bent on self-reform. Much of this activity is driven by the insecurity that stems from the increased inability to accept the basic fact of existential uncertainty. There is logic to this condition, for the polis arose historically from insecurity, while political power, as we call the force concentrated in and through the city, stems from the skill to make people believe in the neutralization of uncertainty through regulatory processes and the advanced deployment of expertise in ever growing areas of life. Much socially legitimate thinking participates in the compulsive fabrication of certainty and its outer expression: the modern state and its visible correlative, the metropolis.

If modernity has been the metropolis's chief ideological propeller, backwardness and stagnation characterize the spaces colonized by the urban myth: the province, the region, the communal forms of life organized through memory and regulated by tradition. Memory involves a sense of identity, which can be defined as the certainty of presence at two separate moments of consciousness – whether it be the subject that is present to itself or the community that renews itself through intergenerational making present of its central values and wisdom.

Modernity presupposes historical consciousness, a new factor in the organization of experience that emerged in the 14th century, at the same time as the process of urbanization began. To be modern was to refashion oneself by outdistancing one's predecessors and constantly recreating the gap by recasting it as insurmountable difference. Interest in the past

as past characterizes modern society; pre-modern collectivities were not keenly aware of the categorical disparities between them and their forerunners. There is a strong connection between that awareness and the self-reflexivity of the present; so strong in fact that the injunction to be modern translates into the exhortation to historicize. If the past is a foreign country (in L. P. Hartley's phrase), then the community's sense of continuity disappears and deracination sets in. Permanence is un-modern and thus tends to be associated with the rural, that is to say, with a sphere of predictability in which relations are governed by memory rather than by history.

There is little doubt that the mid 20th century's meaning of "rural" no longer denotes an objective reality. Over the last sixty years the rural has become inextricably intertwined with the city in many ways, ranging from the ubiquity of the media and Internet to the sprouting of urbanite colonies and second residence developments with their attending restaurants, shops of "typical" or "genuine" products, and services on mountain and at seaside alike. But if the rural has changed, buried under tons of concrete, there is no more ground for the reconstitution of a romantic approach to nature, and a new ruralism can only refer to a critical form of disenchantment, or better yet detachment, that challenges modernity's epistemic superiority and culture's alleged dependence on the city's tempo and intensity of exchanges.

Post-romantic precursors of the neorural turn are often assimilated to nostalgic reaction. Emerson's exaltation of nature or Thoreau's experiment in self-reliance were still too close to the New England ideal of simple, self-regulated communities of responsible individuals not to be considered part of an expansive democratic society. Even so their uneasiness at the growth of cities during a period in which the American urban population increased eleven-fold, spelling the death-knell of the ideal of a pastoral republic, made them belated targets for the champions of urban civilization at the peak of its success. Thus Morton and Lucia White blast Emerson (and a string of Emersonians that include some of the most distinguished American thinkers) for a holistic and organicist anti-urban metaphysics, fortunately overcome by the skill of the city planner who, nonetheless, should not entirely disregard the critical tradition (236-37). But by mid twentieth-century, Heidegger's attachment to the province, Guareschi's predilection for a small world vitally dependent on the Po river, or Pla's identification with the Catalan peasantry, to name three writers who were deliberately anti-modern, were each and for different reasons

identified with political reaction. In Heidegger's case, involvement with National Socialism made his choice of "provincial" life suspect of essentialism and of feeding directly into the Nazi mythology of soil and blood. His existential bond with the Black Forest and his dependence on creative retirement to his hut at Todtnauberg could be seen as evidence of his adherence to dangerous and, in the event, murderous prejudice.

In relation to Heidegger's aloofness from trendy currents of thought, Adam Scharr asks poignantly: "Is hostility to the fashions of cultural debate the beginning of a dangerous totalitarianism? Where the transcendence of 'nature' is evoked, might it not allow an unhealthy detachment from human responsibility? Moreover, might not biological determinism and the rhetoric of blood and soil follow close behind?" (109). Although Scharr does not answer these questions, others have, affirmatively, and on the strength of this indictment have passed judgment on rural artistic preference and on intellectual partiality for the local and the rootedness of thought, i.e., for genuine radicalism. Again Scharr formulates the issue with clarity: "Heidegger's biography brings the cloud of fascism lower over provincialism, asking forcefully whether it must always be invidious and authoritarian" (109). This statement touches on the methodology by which general ethical inferences are drawn from an individual's biographical data. It raises the question of contingency, of whether an individual's political choices must always be seen as full-fledged consequences of his intellectual preoccupations, and the latter as symptoms of an existential paradigm that is a-historical and ubiquitous, subject to abstract determination rather than to the concrete traditions of place. In other words, the question is whether a critique of modernity is inevitably authoritarian, and whether authoritarianism (relinquishing individual agency in face of a superior force) is fascist of necessity. If the correlation of provincial to authoritarian is accurate, there is still the possibility that fascism was Heidegger's existential misinterpretation of intuitions that, while decidedly anti-modern, did not necessarily entail membership in National Socialism, or any other party for that matter. Without such membership, would Heidegger's work ever have come under suspicion of Nazi allegiance? This question is avowedly rhetorical, for there is no historical alternative world in which Heidegger did not carry a Nazi party card. But the question refers us to a more fundamental and potentially answerable one: Is a person's biography determined? More explicitly formulated: is there a logical progression linking Heidegger's birth in conservative Catholic Meßkirch, his early contributions to Catholic publications, his existential philosophy,

and the propaganda speeches delivered during his rectorship at Freiburg university? If one answers affirmatively, then must go on to yet another question: could the internal coherence among Heidegger's life stages and his philosophical production, a cohesiveness that some of his unforgiving critics have discerned in everything ever touched by his thought, be a post-facto illusion? If so, the critical question would turn out to be: without Heidegger's biography, would the cloud of fascism ever have hung so low over provincialism?

But what is, or was, provincialism? In his 1908 book *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, California-born philosopher Josiah Royce spoke of a "higher provincialism" in the sense of a recuperation of the spirit of community in the midst of centralizing modernity which, in his view, generated uniformity and a leveling of individual thought and creativity. Drawing on Hegel's concept of alienation, Royce claimed that the heteronomous management of formerly self-governing social formations could only be restrained by recreating social units in which the individual's action could be commensurate with his social consciousness. "On the other hand – he wrote – , the social life can be that of the great nation, which is so vast that the individuals concerned no longer recognize their social unity in ways which seem to them homelike" (White: 181). Royce was echoing reflections set in circulation in Spain by Valentí Almirall in 1886. Instead of provincialism, Almirall spoke of *particularism*, which he defined as the political organization into complex states made up of smaller self-governing states (149), a proposition that turns up in Royce when he associates the provincial social mind with the mind of small commonwealths such as the original thirteen American colonies (White 181). Almirall's stress on the diversity (and not just the size) of the particular states, and Royce's assertion that in the province alone the social mind is aware of itself as being at home, that is, as having surmounted alienation to a strange law, chime with Heidegger's view of the spatial limitation of consciousness as a condition for the disclosure of phenomena that spring from Being.

For Heidegger, the province was unequivocally related to the horizon and hence to the limits of the self. Such limits presuppose the far side of the horizon as the non-self, with the understanding that the other side of what is perceived as the objects of the world is indispensable to their appearing. For him the province, or more philosophically, the region, was inseparable from thinking. Consequently, rationalism's assumption of a boundless reason hitched to a subject stood corrected by the sense of a gradually self-disclosing truth. In his 1944-45 "Conversation on a Country Path",

he described the horizon as "the side facing us of an openness which surrounds us" and then answers the question about this openness by saying: "It strikes me as something like a *region*, an enchanted region where everything belonging there returns to that in which it rests" (64-65). If medieval poets imagined enchanted space as a *hortus conclusus*, Heidegger conceives the region as an opening beyond representation that re-appropriates beings ("everything belonging there") into their belonging, that is re-situates them into the ground of their existence, which the region is. The image is one of dislocation through the modern subject's conflation of thinking with representation, followed, through a more pliant (*gelassen*) form of thinking, by relocation to the region in which beings can rest in the law of their belonging. The theological undertones are unmistakable, and Heidegger's peripatetic "discourse" in three voices resembles Dante's exploration of the medieval cosmos through sojourns in regions before he discerns the law that produces motion out of the motionless (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII: 145). But with Heidegger we remain in secular space, even though his stress on surrendering willful thinking and the tortuous description of receptive thinking infuriates the partisans of a philosophy of consciousness in which *homo rationalis* is in command. Heidegger is responsible for a Copernican reverse in the philosophy of consciousness, through which the subject is displaced from his central position and made to progress in asymptotic fashion toward the self-disclosure of Being.

For his "provincial" thinking, the *region* does all the work, surpassing idealism's *a priori* conditions of experience through a temporality that is not that of the transcendental subject. "The region gathers, just as if nothing were happening, each to each and each to all into an abiding, while resting in itself. Regioning is a gathering and re-sheltering for an expanded resting into an abiding" (66). The reformulation of the substantive "region" into the verbal "regioning" introduces a typically Heideggerian paraphrase for an idea that lacks conventional expression: "that-which-regions" (66). "That-which-regions" is neither an entity nor a representable object, but the active condition of the gathering into pre-objectual status of that which appears to us dispersed and fragmented as objects.

If we now retreat from Heidegger's cryptic thinking to a still philosophical but more intuitive description of the region, we obtain the following:

> Regions hold their constituent places together in an intricate dovetailing of space and time. They act to individuate space and time, endowing them

> with a local habitation and a name: the name of a region in fact often reflects its spatiotemporal individuation, and its local habitation is based on the places that populate it and create a basis for shared experience. (Casey: 75)

In what is perhaps inadvertently a post-Heideggerian approach to the region, Edward Casey retains the dynamic sense of the term whereby "regions" actively gather what appears within their horizon ("their constituent places"). Regions, furthermore, change the transcendental nature of space and time by "individuating" them not in the perception of the epistemological subject but in the external world, so to speak. Yet, while individuation of space inheres in the normative understanding of "region", it is less clear what is meant by the region's individuation of time. Apparently, spatiotemporal individuation manifests itself in the possibility of "shared experience", and shared experience on the temporal axis refers us to history, which is the name we give to the contents of experience insofar as they reveal the unfolding of human nature. This is how Heidegger formulates the intrinsic relation between "regioning" and history: "The historical rests in that-which-regions, and in what occurs as that-which-regions. It rests in what, coming to pass in man, regions him into his nature" (79). While for Heidegger the history in question "does not consist in the happenings and deeds of the world. ... Nor in the cultural achievements of man" (79), but in the self-disclosure of Being, for Casey the individuation of space and time is inseparable from the foundation of a local habitation (what Heidegger subsumes under the notion of "dwelling") and from the act of naming. Naming, as a poetic act, is not a determining action; it does not define or convey the thing named. "The name of a region", says Casey, "often reflects its spatiotemporal individuation", where the word "reflects" does not stand for "represents" or "encapsulates" and even less for "metaphorizes", but returns a meaning (like light bouncing off a polished surface) that is shot through with the temporality of its unfolding. "Because a word does not and never can re-present anything; but signifies something, that is, shows something as abiding into the range of its expressibility" (Heidegger: 69).

With the poet Verdaguer, says Perejaume, the Pyrenees became a thread of ink (117). Perejaume himself undertook to invert the effect by inscribing the name Verdaguer in the landscape of his birthplace, Folgueroles, using its natural accidents as writing materials. And just as Verdaguer's epic poem *Canigó* does not re-present the Pyrenees but individualizes the region, compressing it into a stream of ink from which history emerges

only to come to rest in a sort of natural eternity, so does the poet's name, traced by the artist in the flow of a country stream, restore to nature a meaning which, by virtue of its regioning, constitutes the full range of the sign's expressive possibilities. For the word "Verdaguer" no longer names a poet born in the region; rather, what it names is the region itself, or, more precisely, naming is the poet's or artist's gesture by which something that was previously nameless is regioned. Perejaume's *landart* in the form of inscription endows the name with the paradoxical instability of a constantly changing signifier, since the water that traces the calligraphy of the poet's name is, like Heraclitus's river, always different from itself. By becoming a thread of water through that-which-regions, Verdaguer achieves nobility in Heidegger's sense: Noble is "what abides in the origins of its nature" (82). "Verdaguer" thus names the region and comes to rest in its abiding, while individuating the Heraclitean temporality of a nature that produces itself in and through its regioning.

It would be a mistake to suspect essentialism in artistic or simply human responsiveness to the rural world, a charge that has been leveled against Heidegger's provincialism. Yet his mythologizing of the presencing of things in the vicinity of a long-settled community and his late introduction of the *fourfold* as the composite nature of dwelling (saving the earth, receiving the sky, awaiting the divinities, and preparing for one's own death) (Heidegger 1971: 150-151) are not a regression to pantheism or the cult of local idols. Heidegger's reflection on the intrinsic dependence of humans on the most primary of matrices is neither totalitarian nor mystical; it is radically phenomenological, positing another side (the open side) to that which appears to consciousness. If the reflection ended up acquiring cosmological features, this has less to do with Heidegger's alleged descent into irrationality than with the austere, almost ascetic quality of his thinking. Absent from this thinking is the idea of the landscape emotionally offsetting the discord between humans and nature, although possibly there is a remnant of the romantic idea of the landscape (through the notion of the horizon) as the determined form of the undetermined. Joachim Ritter, commenting on Schiller's conception of the landscape as the aesthetic content of freedom, writes: "Freedom is existence (Dasein) above subdued nature. Hence nature as landscape can only exist under the condition of freedom on the basis of modern society" (162). If the landscape has become such an unquestionable value, it is precisely because it conjures up a space of self-determination that is everywhere denied by modern society. In this light, the experience of the landscape would be

the aesthetic compensation for the tension between nature and spirit, a tension that resolves itself into a beautiful for-itself nature and a nature given over to human exploitation and devastation (Zimmer: 30). There is no such sentimental alibi in Heidegger. On the contrary, he strives to rescue nature from the (for him, destructive and self-destructive) metaphysics of representation.

Aestheticization of the landscape is also absent from another precursor of the new ruralism, Josep Pla. To be sure, he describes fields, mountains, forests and shores, but does so in a way that revokes the split between a nature objectified as aesthetic object and as raw material. Acutely conscious of the economic subjection of the country by the city, Pla always observes the landscape in relation to its historical utilization and modification by human settlement. He often expresses his predilection for landscapes organized with a view to profitability and, at the antipodes of the romantic sublime, for landscapes that are subdued with a view to human comfort. Where Heidegger perceives divinities, Pla observes concrete economic agents; in the earth he sees property; in the sky, the color of the atmosphere and the direction, strength and humidity of the winds; and instead of mortals (for Heidegger the only beings who die), universal dissolution. But Pla too was skeptical of the alleged advantage of the city for a true grasp of the human condition. His supple use of the term *país*, somewhat similar to the German *Heimat*, has the quality of a niche, as in ecology, but also of a horizon, in Heidegger's sense of the visible and visible-making side of that-which-regions. *País*, for Pla, is also the sounding box of a language, the space in which its meanings are organized through the concrete experiences of humans molded by a millennial struggle with the features of the land, the sea, and the climate.

With Pla it is not a question of authenticity but of honesty and its failure, self-delusion. Hence the impression of cynicism that he projects, hardly underplayed by his impersonating the peasant as an ontological and not just sociological type. In Pla's world people are always preying and being preyed upon; it is the law of life. But in this form of living that is reduced to primary, almost biological impulses, there is, as if by magic, an interval of radiant presence, the gift, or, in his own homely language, the tip that existence sometimes grants for no discernible reason. Like Heidegger, Pla inaugurated a new rural sensibility at the height of the urban myth. He challenged the *doxa* of modernity when it was unconditionally hegemonic and miscreants were ridiculed and burned at the intellectual stake. Today the dichotomy between metropolitan and provincial exudes

an odor of stagnant thinking. The city is no longer just a market for the country's surplus production but has become the source of products and services consumed in the country, thus reversing the traditional relation of dependence, as agricultural production is now industrialized and relocated to areas with cheap labor, or, when this is not possible or profitable, low-wage labor is imported, upsetting the communitarian basis of country life.

In Catalonia, between 1999 and 2007, 12,128 farms disappeared, a loss of 18% in less than a decade. In human terms, this figure represents four peasants quitting every day. They did so mostly for economic reasons, as cultivation of the land became non-profitable. Every time this happens, the intergenerational transmission of an ancient way of life is broken since it is mostly the young who leave the farm to seek other ways of making a living (Tort). At the same time, the population is growing and its distribution changing, so that centripetal migration is no longer the norm. Now people settle across the territory. Projections until 2021, when Catalonia's demography is expected to reach eight million, suggest that growth will be higher outside Barcelona's metropolitan area, with the city losing population (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya). Given Catalonia's similarity to other postindustrial societies, its pattern of territorial redeployment could suggest a wider trend. What emerges is a hybrid territory of suburbanized villages and mid-size towns that feature many of the city's conveniences, whose residents are often linked to the Worldwide Web and participate in national and transnational debates through the Internet. Many of these "rural" sites are now cosmopolitan microspaces, with permanent or temporary residents of diverse origins and cultures, who move in either as migrants or as retirees, vacationers, or weekenders. Whether, in face of the new demographic reality, it is still legitimate to speak of provincial thinking and regional cultures is certainly moot, but the new ruralism does not aim to reverse the myth of modernity and re-mystify the country as the locus of genuine culture. It has no truck with the neoromanticism that reinvests nature with allegorical significance and conceives human communion with the natural sublime as an expression of man's metaphysical destiny (Tomatis: 26 and passim).

Myths die hard. The myth of the city's effect on the development of rationality and higher forms of intelligence has transcended human culture and set up shop in the biological sciences. The 19th-century form of discrimination between urban and rural populations, as between different races, finds unexpected support from studies that assert that city

birds have a bigger brain and higher capacity for innovation (Maklakov: 2). Brain size would be, according to such studies, the boundary between species inside and outside urban environments. Popular as well as academic culture has been instilling this notion for a long time, and evolutionary science shows itself indebted to this tradition when introducing into its hypotheses a value judgment whereby city conditions are the test of adaptive behavior and larger brains proof of species superiority. What if the findings merely reflected the prejudice that man-made, that is man-distorted environments, point the way to evolution's allegedly blind force? What if the city proved to be an evolutionary dead end? Or if the great migrations into cities were to undergo a reversal, whereby, as has already occurred in many American cities, brainpower and wealth migrate to suburbs whose remoteness from the downtown is often measured by social success? A new urban exodus is silently taking place in Catalonia, this time without the ideological underpinnings of the 1960s and 70s neoruralism, whereby urban youth look in the mountains for the work they cannot find in the city and thus help to revitalize decaying villages (Altarriba).

The new ruralism takes as its premise a Catalan politician's ironic observation that there is intelligent life beyond the metropolitan area (Orteu 52), drawing from this long-forgotten truism the working hypothesis that from that intelligence new paradigms of thought might emerge. Paying heed to the crisis of modernity, which is also and everywhere an urban crisis, such thought would hopefully retool our conceptual apparatus to operate less aggressively toward the concrete aspects of life and in ways that are sensitive to the sensual cultures whose traces we recognize in works such as Pla's. As Nogué puts it, "we have been capable of thinking the city but not the rest of the territory. We have intervened with considerable skill in the city, in compact urban space, but we have not been able to do the same on the territory that spreads beyond the imaginary walls of the traditional city" (282). The new ruralism takes up the challenge to think the territory, though not necessarily in the spirit of intervention as theorized by Nogué and others from the Observatori del Paisatge and similar institutions. Territorial planning and landscape management are perhaps inevitable consequences of the modernization that has led to the exhaustion of resources which, like the landscape, appeared to be inexhaustible because they were predicated on a subjectivity that seemed boundless. With the crisis of the subject it was inevitable that the landscape would undergo devaluation. Not for nothing its emergence was bound up with

self-reflexivity and the opening of an inner space of freedom that compensated for the encroaching determinations that characterize modern society. Describing Petrarch's legendary ascent of Mont Ventoux, Ritter glosses: Tired from clambering, Petrarch compares his physical mountaineering to a spiritual climb, turning away from the landscape and toward the soul, which alone he finds worthy of contemplation (143). Paradoxically, Augustinian reflexivity rules the moment when Petrarch reaches the summit and gains the coveted view for whose sake he had undertaken the climbing. Turning the gaze to his own subjectivity, Petrarch shuts out the view, producing an ideal representation of the ascent in the form of an allegorical pilgrimage of the soul.

Preoccupation with the self to the exclusion of the non-self, blindness to the great opening beyond the subject's horizon, were part of the metaphysics that Heidegger tried to surmount through his critique of representation. Although the landscape emerged and thus belonged to "the age of the world picture", this does not cancel the fact that the conditions under which it is being destroyed do not appear to inaugurate a new form of thought that, by turning reflexivity inside out, retrieves something like Schiller's idea of freedom. This retrieval, were it to come about, would not be located in the aesthetic experience of the land, which is otherwise hostage to modern urban society, but perhaps, quite simply, in the renewed ability to listen through the land to an ancestral knowledge that is vaster than that of a single individual, era, or nationality, though at the same time requiring each of these specifications in order to be experienced.

The new form of thinking may be related to Heidegger's notion of "releasement into that-which-regions" (74), but has also found a name in Perejaume's concept of *oïsme* ("hearingness"), which is perhaps best described in the epigraph to his essay of that name: "Of how the lower strata of the air are also a geological stratum, although more fluctuating and changeable, where the air brings into play summits of voice 'where snow can't linger'" (45). Hearing, in this sense, is akin to Heidegger's notion of waiting for releasement into the open of that-which-regions. It is also detecting a necessity of things that is spelled out in their names, entering a linguistic space in which words are not the product of communicational poverty but traces left by the natural features of the world in the flow of Being; glimpses, or even better, souvenirs of the "regioned" modality of the air. *Pneuma* or *spirit* touches human lips as the wind fingers heights where snow does not linger. A *flatus vocis* produces sounds, and the sounds are animated by intuitions that become conventions to which the experi-

ence cannot hold for long. Humans try to appropriate the sounds with the vanity of deluded demiurges, only to realize that words that are hitched to the will deteriorate with the speed of our degrading landscapes.

New ruralism is not about retiring to the country or rebuilding ruined landscapes, nor about conserving quaint forms of life. It is rather about asking if the forms of thinking that led to the hegemony of the dissociated modern subject – forms that have produced extraordinarily complex subjectivities but also a tremendous wasteland in which the subject risks self-consumption – are giving way to thinking that knows how to turn the world into full forms of presence, thinking that reflects on, rather than away from, the regioned specifications of space and time, and foregrounds them – this place, this hour – instead of burning them as dispensable fuel for the production of abstract, empty-formed, interchangeable thinking.