

Historical architecture heritage

Preservation and sustainable development

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**Transmitting the past to the future :
an ontological consideration on tradition and modernity**

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Abstract – *The reigning model of development is unsustainable on three grounds: 1. Ecologically, because of its disproportionate ecological footprint; 2. Ethically, because it entails growing inequalities; 3. Aesthetically, because it disrupts landscape. Its antidote is preservation, but this only produces more incoherence between what is preserved and what is not, thus aggravating unsustainability. This is due to the fact that, whereas tradition preserved ways of being, modernity preserves objects, which are turned into consumption goods, the growing consumption of which (e.g. by tourism) still aggravates the unsustainability of the modern way of life. It appears that, while transmitting objects from the past to the future, the modern way of being is, as Heidegger put it, a "Being toward death" (Sein zum Tode), with no perspective beyond the death of the individual. This ontological contradiction, which is proper to modernity, is unsustainable on the long run. Beyond modernity, we have to pave the way to a new stage in the history of Being, which Watsuji termed "Being toward life" (sei e no sonzai). This ontological revolution is the basic condition of a sustainable world.*

1. Architectural heritage as an ontological question

That the form of cities is not the same everywhere, and that it evolves in time, is a geographical and historical evidence. Almost as evident is the fact that human societies have specific attitudes towards the forms of their cities. This appears immediately when one compares different epochs in history and different cultures in the world. Such a comparison shows in particular that the contemporary Western attitude, as expressed for example by the notion of cultural heritage in the UNESCO's *Convention for the protection of the world heritage* adopted in 1972, is not universal. This expression is not understood in the same way in all the countries of the world, the "protection" which it implies is practised differently – if practised at all –, and in Europe itself, it has not always been practised as it is now advocated by cultural authorities like, for example, the Ministry of Culture in France, which promotes each year two "Days of the Heritage" (*Journées du Patrimoine*). Such "Days of the Heritage" have become a custom all over Europe by now, and their object seems to be a matter of common sense. That is, preserving the material forms of history is nowadays in Western societies a sort of moral obligation, with direct political implications. In this respect, it is worth quoting the first few lines of the text with which, in 2001, Mrs Catherine Tasca, Minister for Culture and Communication, introduced the program devised for the 2001 edition of the Days of the Heritage in France¹ :

The European Days of the Heritage are traditionally an important meeting for democracy. In a weekend's time, our fellow citizens reinvest the places of republican power and celebrate the fruits of a shared history and culture. In all the communes of France and, by now, in 48 countries in Europe, professionals, owners and volunteers unveil the unrecognized treasures of our cities and countryside. They encourage us to look in a different way at our built environment, too often concealed in the indifference of everyday life. This year, this civic dimension will be particularly present, since we shall celebrate, on the occasion of the centenary of the July 1st, 1901 Law, the forms of associative engagement.²

What these lines reveal is a typically modern Western attitude. Yet we must not forget that modernity, in its historically Western hegemonic version, is that civilization which precisely has brought forth a massive destruction of the historical forms of cities all over the world, inducing a global uniformization of the built environment and a general loss of cultural identity.

¹ I translate from *Les Journées du Patrimoine 2001*, Publication de la Direction régionale des affaires culturelles de l'Aquitaine (conservation des Monuments historiques) et de l'Union régionale des conseils d'architecture, d'urbanisme et d'environnement, Bordeaux, 2001, p. 2. For more informations, see <http://www.culture.fr>, and more specifically www.renaissancedescites.org (e-mail : renaissancedescites@free.fr).

² Non-profit associations, as instituted by the law of 1901, are particularly active in the preservation of the cultural heritage and the environment.

This uniformization and loss of identity of cities is even more pronounced in countries which belong to other traditions than the European one, and which, for that reason, adopted the modern Western civilizational paradigm later than its European cradle. As a matter of fact, from a very general point of view, it can be said that a reaction against the modern uniformization and loss of identity of cities emerged earlier in Europe than elsewhere in the world precisely because Europe modernized earlier. Accordingly, such attitudes as expressed in Mrs Tasca's text have emerged later in other parts of the world, or are still due to emerge.

In other words, modernity produces sooner or later the counter-effects or the antidotes of its paradigm inasmuch as this paradigm is effective. This is certainly true to some degree, if one examines the history of ideas and practices relating to the preservation of urban forms in Europe itself and in other parts of the world. Yet, it is no less evident that, even before the modern Western civilizational paradigm established itself, and still after its imposition in different parts of the world, there were and are various types of human attitudes toward historical forms. According to culture, identity is not understood and performed in the same ways. What is a heritage, what is a monument, what is to be preserved does not mean the same thing in, say, Paris and Beijing.

This entails that, when speaking of such things, one has to combine two apparently contradictory approaches. One relates in universal terms to the global effects and counter-effects of the modern paradigm; which is to say that more or less the same problems exist or will arise everywhere in the world, and that we have to deal with them in common terms, exchanging our experiences and emulating each other for a better quality of the environment all over the world. The second approach relates to the foundations of these very terms which we deem to be common, like "heritage", "monument" or "preservation", and which in fact are not common; they always have a singular meaning, simply because human beings are not the same everywhere at any time. Beijing is not Paris because the Chinese are not French, and one should not overlook this difference, precisely because, through heritage and monuments, it is cultural identity, that is, a way of being, which is at stake.

Yet we cannot content ourselves with juxtaposing these two contradictory approaches. This leads nowhere else than to further contradictions and misunderstandings, be it on a national or an international plane. We have to overcome, in this respect, the apparent incompatibility of the universal and the singular. This paper intends to suggest that it is not impossible, provided that we recognize that such an overcoming is not only a technical and political, but an ontological problem; that is, a matter of being and existence.

2. How the modern notion of heritage emerged in Europe

The rapid transformation of the environment, particularly that of cities, which, starting with Great Britain, was entailed by modern industry in European countries, soon induced various forms of reaction against these transformations. Yet, even before these material effects, a reaction against modern universalism had already occurred as soon as the second half of the 18th century, enhancing the respective peculiarity of different cultures; e.g. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803)'s *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (*Another philosophy of the historical formation of Humankind*, 1774) and *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit* (*Ideas for a history of Humankind*, 1784). Romanticism gave a general background to both types of reactions. This trend of ideas developed in the 19th century into such works as, in Great Britain, those of John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896), who inspired the creation of the *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society* in 1888, or in France those of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), known among others for his restoration of the mediaeval forms of the city of Carcassonne, the works of which were conducted from 1844 to 1910. Toward the end of the 19th century, this trend of ideas had grown up into an important current in city planning, which was illustrated in Austria by Camillo Sitte (1843-1903)'s *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* (*Artistic principles of town planning*, 1889). It had also brought forth a general reflection about the nature of monuments and their role in modern society, as illustrated in the Viennese historian Alois Riegl's *Der moderne Denkmalkultus* (*The modern cult of monuments*, 1903).³

Through such works and their influence, it can be said that the general frame of the modern attitude toward the preservation of the built heritage was already set by 1900. It was

³ More details about this general trend of ideas and practises in Yannis TSIOMIS *et al.*, *Ville-Cité. Des patrimoines européens*, Paris : Picard, 1998.

implemented through diverse laws in the 20th century, leading to the convention enacted in 1972 by the UNESCO. However, one must not overlook the fact that this attitude was far from being the only possible one in the Western world. On the one hand, until the Renaissance, such an attitude was unknown in Europe. On the other hand, preserving the urban environment as a cultural heritage had very strong adverse factors and opponents in the very nature of modernity, as was expressed by what Françoise Choay has called *l'urbanisme progressiste*.⁴ It can be said, for example, that Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1887-1965)'s attitude was antithetic to that of Camillo Sitte (whom Choay considers as a paragon of *l'urbanisme culturaliste*). In his *Plan pour une ville contemporaine de 3 millions d'habitants* (*Plan for a contemporary city of 3 million inhabitants*, 1922), later evolved into his *Plan Voisin de Paris* (*Voisin plan for Paris*, 1925)⁵, he proposed no less than scrapping the existing forms of Paris and replacing them with the wide geometrical forms of sky scrapers along orthogonal avenues, only interspersed here and there with a few monuments like Notre-Dame cathedral, preserved in their original form.

That the *Plan Voisin* appeared at the time as a provocation and was eventually not adopted in Paris must not hide the fact that it expressed the essence of modernity in urban matters. That is, *to scrap* on the one hand, and *to freeze* on the other hand. This juxtaposition of scrapping and freezing has been performed in various and variable balances all over the world in the 20th century, and it is still going on ; e.g., for more scrapping than freezing, in capitals like Beijing, or for more freezing than scrapping, in capitals like Paris. In such a juncture, what is not taken into account is something which the pre-modern history of cities had brought forth: *urban composition*, as a harmonious material expression of urbanity.

We shall come back to this question in part 4, while stressing that it is not conceivable, and even less practicable, in the ontological paradigm of modernity. Yet before that, we must delve a little further into the reasons which have led to the modern juxtaposition of scrapping or freezing urban forms.

As Choay's classical study *L'Allégorie du patrimoine* (*The allegory of heritage*)⁶ has shown, the modern idea of historical monument (*Denkmal* in Riegl's sense) can be said to have appeared in Rome about 1420.⁷ Before the Renaissance, people did not feel any distance toward ancient forms, architectural or others. This is why, in mediaeval times, they could use the stones of antique buildings, such as the Colosseum, for contemporary necessities. This attitude was shared by all pre-modern societies. For example, stones from the Pyramids were used by the Arabs for building Fustat (Cairo). What happened at the Renaissance was a *mise en histoire* ; that is, the emergence of a sense of distance in time, which Choay aptly relates with the emergence of modern perspective in painting. Both in time and in space, an essential difference was progressively introduced between what was to become later, in ontological terms, the subject and the object, and which until then had been felt as one same reality. As for history, this sense of distance was first expressed in Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) 's *Africa* (1338), in which Antiquity appears as something saint and sacred in itself, and by this very fact, in an essential otherness.⁸ This was initially limited to the study of ancient literature, but later, Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) introduced the same state of mind - that is, historical distance - in the discovery of the proper identity of ancient architectural forms.⁹

At that time was born the historical movement which led progressively to the attitude which we have seen above; that is, to respect the very historicity of ancient forms. At the same time occurred a transformation of the notion of monument. The Latin word *monumentum* derives from the verb *monere*, itself derived from the Indo-European root *men-*, meaning the movement of the mind (as a matter of fact, the English words "meaning" and "mind" both derive from that same root). The initial meaning of *monere* is "to remind"; and accordingly, *monumentum* meant anything reminding of something, especially in written form. It is for example in this sense that it is used in Horatius' (Quintus Horatius Flaccus, 65-8 BC) famous expression *Exegi monumentum aere perennius* ("I achieved a monument more durable than bronze"), at the end of the third book of his *Odes*. Only in the 18th century did the word "monument" acquire its essential meaning

⁴ Françoise CHOAY, *L'Urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie*, Paris : Seuil, 1965.

⁵ "Voisin" here is a place name (that of a plane factory), and does not mean "neighbour", as often mistranslated.

⁶ Paris : Seuil, 1992.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 38 sq.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 40 sq.

nowadays, i.e. that of a material building of remarkable size and/or age; and only in the 20th century did whole sets of material buildings, i.e. urban environments, acquire the status of historical monuments, as such to be protected and preserved in their initial forms. That is, *frozen*.

3. The limits of the modern Western paradigm

This modern transformation corresponds to the ontological shift, analysed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) in *Sein und Zeit* (1927), from *Geschichtlichkeit* to *Historischkeit*; that is, from lived history to objectified history. In other words, it corresponds to the emergence of modern dualism. It is this shift which made possible the emergence of the respect of ancient built environments as historical monuments, and which, consequently, brought forth modern conservational policies such as those advocated by the UNESCO's convention of 1972.

Now, there is an essential contradiction in this attitude; because it supposes, on the one hand, the capacity to recognize the proper historical value of certain built forms, that is, the intrinsic value of objects, as distinct from the subjective interests of contemporary people, while on the other hand it is advocated in the name of the cultural identity of those same people; that is, it implies a negation of that very dualism which made possible the emergence of the modern notions of monument and heritage.

A good example of this aporia can be found in a reflection made in 1987 by Mrs Choay at the occasion of a bilateral, French and Japanese symposium on *La Qualité de la ville / Toshi ni kosei wo 都市に個性を* (*The quality of the city*): "Whether prevails the symbolic permanence of the form in space or that of the matter in time, in any case it is that same kind of conservation, universal and identificatory, which the question is about".¹⁰ Choay's expression "the symbolic permanence of the form in space" alludes to the famous case of the temples of Ise shrine (*Ise jingo* 伊勢神宮), in Japan, which are ritually rebuilt with new material (*hinoki* 檜, or Japanese cypress) every twentieth year in their initial form, dating back to Antiquity.¹¹ She opposes this practice of monumentality to the European one, in which preserving the authenticity of the initial material is more important, be it in the form of ruins, that is, at the expense of the initial form. Though interesting and profound Choay's reflection may be, it remains totally circumscribed within the modern classical Western paradigm, that of Descartes and Newton, which presupposes the universalness of space and time, and which therefore is about the form and/or the matter of objects.¹² Here lies the aporia, since, at the same time, Choay speaks of an "identificatory" function of such objects; which implies a transgression of the modern duality between subject and object. In Heideggerian terms, the identification of a society with its monuments belongs to the dimension of the *geschichtlich*, and therefore has nothing to do with the universalness of space and/or time, which on the contrary belongs to the dimension of the *historisch*. In terms of *Geschichtlichkeit*, there is nothing like "universal space and/or time", which is an abstract, modern prerequisite for the existence of objects as such; what there is, is the concreteness of things in the "country" (*Gegend*) of existence, in which neither subject and object, matter and form, nor space and time, can be dissociated.

As a matter of fact, the periodic reconstruction of Ise shrine is an exemplary expression of *Geschichtlichkeit* as an absolute negation of that historical distance which - as Choay herself has made clear - appeared in Europe at the Renaissance; because ancient forms are here indefinitely enacted as if they were present forms. This is not all. Such enaction of the ancient through the

¹⁰ "Que prévale la permanence symbolique de la forme dans l'espace ou celle de la matière dans le temps, dans l'un et l'autre cas, c'est du même genre de conservation, universelle et identificatoire qu'il s'agit". Françoise CHOAY, 'Mémoire de la ville et monumentalité', in Augustin BERQUE (ed.) *La Qualité de la ville. Urbanité française, urbanité nipponne*, Tokyo : Maison franco-japonaise, 1987, p. 123. For more comparisons of the monumentality of Ise with a European counterpart (namely the Roman therms of Cluny in Paris), see Augustin BERQUE, *Japan : Cities and Social Bonds*, Yelvertoft Manor : Pilkington, 1997 (*Du Geste à la cité. Formes urbaines et lien social au Japon*, Paris : Gallimard, 1993), chap. I ('Devenir : ville japonaise, espace-temps'), and Augustin BERQUE, *Toshi no kosumoroji. Nichi-Bei-Ou toshi hikaku, 都市のコスモロジー. 日米欧都市比較*, Tokyo : Kodansha gendai shinsho, 1993, chap. I ('Yurianusu no yokujô to Ise jingû コリアヌスの浴場と伊勢神宮').

¹¹ The shrine originates in the transfer of the cult of the Sun goddess Amaterasu Oomikami 天照大神 from Yamato 大和 to Ise toward the end of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th century. The rite of reconstructing the main temple every twentieth year was established under the reign of Temmu (天武, died in 686).

¹² For an interpretation of this same problem in terms of history of science, see Alexandre KOYRE's classical study *From the closed world to the infinite universe*, Baltimore : John Hopkins Press, 1957.

present, in its turn, is an absolute negation of dualism; because the form which is at stake here is, indissociably, that of the building which is built and that of the rite by dint of which it is built. Now, a rite is a social performance, i.e. that of acting human subjects; and this performance is nothing else than a form in time. This is to say that what is going on at Ise is much more than the *historisch* production of an objective form in space; it is an illustration of the congenial, *geschichtlich* link of things and people in the country of existence.

The case of Ise illustrates something utterly alien to the categories of modern thought; that is, the fact that the form of a thing is not limited to its objective, material and measurable appearance, since it implies human existence. In the conceptual tradition of East Asia, this idea was expressed in various ways, for example by Zong Bing (宗炳, 375-443) when he wrote, in the first lines of his *Hua shanshui xu* (画山水序, *Introduction to landscape painting*, i.e. the first treatise on that matter in human history), that *zhi yu shanshui, zhi you er qu ling* 至於山水、質有而趣靈¹³; which means that landscape is not limited to material forms, and tends to the spiritual. In other words, it is not limited to a "form in space" (as says Choay), which in Chinese is called *waixing* 外形, i.e. the "external shape" of things. Such an idea is very ancient, since one can already find it in a formula of the Great Commentary (*Zhou Yi Da Zhuan* 周易大傳, or *Xi Ci* 繫辭) of the Book of Changes (*Yijing* 易經 or *Zhou Yi* 周易). The Great Commentary is attributed to the Confucian school of the end of the Warring States (4th-3rd century B.C.). It says that the Way is above form, while under it is the Vessel (*Xing er shang zhe wei zhi Dao, xing er xia zhe wei zhe Qi* 形而上者謂之道、形而下者謂之器).¹⁴ In other words, the reality of things exceeds their material shape, which is only their "vessel", or container.

Such a conception has directly influenced modern cultural policies in East Asia, following Japan. It implies, among others, that monuments, or cultural assets (*bunkazai* 文化財 in Japanese), are not limited to material objects. *Bunkazai* comprise human subjects as well. Modern legislation in this matter started in Meiji 明治 31 (1898), concerning the protection of religious buildings, but the present system was established in Shōwa 昭和 25 (1950) by the Law for the protection of cultural assets (*Bunkazai Hogo Hō* 文化財保護法).¹⁵ This system is meant to protect both "cultural assets having a form" (*yūkei bunkazai* 有形文化財) and "cultural assets not having a form" (*mukei bunkazai* 無形文化財). The first category concerns such things as paintings, sculptures, buildings, historical or natural sites, etc.; i.e. things which can easily be grasped within the modern conception of the object. On the other hand, the second category exceeds radically this conception, since it comprises not only traditional arts and crafts, but the very persons performing these arts and crafts; e.g. potters or actors.

What must be understood here is that the word *kei* (形 form) in such expressions as *yūkei bunkazai* and *mukei bunkazai* corresponds to what is in fact called the "external shape" (*waixing* 外形) of things in the Chinese (and consequently East Asian) tradition; which, as we have seen, is only the material or visible recipient of reality (i.e. that which Zong Bing called *zhi* 質, the material form of the landscape). In Chinese philosophy, the notion of *youxing* (which is pronounced *yūkei* in Japanese) is already used in the *Han Feizi* 韓非子, at the end of the Warring States, in the sense of "having a real, material form". Advocated by the Legist school (*Fajia* 法家), it was opposed at the time by the notion of *wuxing* 無形 (*mukei* in Japanese), advocated by the Taoists. In the *Laozi* 老子 (section 41) one can read the following: *Da Xiang wu xing* (大像無形 the Greater Form¹⁶ has no shape). This means that true reality exceeds the visible, material shape

¹³ This passage is reproduced p. 288 in PAN Yungao 潘運告 *et al.*'s anthology *Han Wei Liu-Chao shu hua lun* 漢魏六朝, Changsha: Hunan Meishu Chubanshe, 1999.

¹⁴ *Xi Ci shang*, 繫辭上 quoted in the *Kadokawa Dai Jigen* 角川大字典, Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1992, art. *Keijijō* 形而上, p. 600.

¹⁵ On this system, concerning more specifically the preservation of historical cities, see Claire GALLIAN, 'Système de protection du patrimoine dans la ville japonaise', p. 139-149 in Augustin BERQUE (ed.), *op. cit.* in note 10.

¹⁶ *Da Xiang* is generally translated with "Great Image" (e.g. "grande image" in Liou Kia-Hway's translation of the *Daode jing* in *Philosophes taoïstes*, Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1980 (1967), p. 44), but I prefer "form", following the Japanese usage of adding the *rubi* (reading) *katachi* to the sinogram *shō* (*xiang* in Chinese). For example, in his edition of the *Laozi* (Tokyo: Chūkō bunko, 1973), p. 85, Ogawa Kanju 小川環樹 gives the following reading and translation of the Chinese *Da Xiang wu xing*: *Taishō wa katachi nashi* and *Ooi naru «katachi» ni wa (kore to iu) keijō ga nai* 大いなる「かたち」には(これという)形状がない. My own translation of *Da Xiang* with "the Greater Form" corresponds to *Ooi naru katachi*. It is, besides, somewhat influenced by the expression "Greater London", famous in the history of urban planning, and anyway bases on existential considerations which I expound below.

of things – an idea which, as we have seen, was expressed several centuries later by Zong Bing when he defined the principles of landscape painting, and which, down to contemporary attitudes toward the protection of cultural heritage, has profoundly influenced the conception of reality in East Asia. The very idea of "cultural assets not having a form" has here its origin; and this clearly shows that what is at stake here is the possibility to take human existence into account.

As a matter of fact, such a conception of the "greater form" of things, exceeding their "external shape" and which is their true reality, implies an existential conception of being and of identity, integrating the human and the environment into one reality. Now, this can definitely not be grasped within the conceptual frame of the modern Western paradigm, which radically dissociates the subjective from the objective. And here is indeed the dead end of this paradigm: tremendously effective though it may be, it cannot take human *existence* into account; it can only juxtapose individual subjects and individual objects.

4. Sustainable identity

I am using here the word "existence" in its original meaning,¹⁷ that which Heidegger made use of in *Sein und Zeit* and to which corresponds his concept of *Ausser-sich-sein*, "being-outside-of-oneself". It is profoundly alien to the conception of identity which, since Aristotelian logic, founded rational inference in Europe and is at the origin of modern science. In this logic, A is not non-A. There no possible intermediate being between what the thing is (A) and what it is not (non-A). There is only the identity (A) of a substantial being (*ousia*), or the negation of this identity (non-A) by the otherness of another substantial being. This conception of identity is in tune with Aristotle's conception of place (*topos*) as *to tou periechontos peras akinèton prôton*, "the immediate immobile enveloping limit" (*Physika*, 212 a 20) of a being. This would be to say that the place, and correlatively the identity of a thing, is limited to what is called its external shape (*waixing*) in the Chinese tradition, or the Vessel (*Qi*) in the Great Commentary of the *Yi jing*. Obviously, the Taoist concept of "greater form", and, by the same token, the Heideggerian concept of "being-outside-of-oneself", are incompatible with Aristotelian logic.

Now, the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarô (西田幾多郎, 1870-1945) has shown that the reality of worldliness (*sekaisei* 世界性) cannot be grasped by Aristotelian logic, to which he opposed what he called "logic of place", *basho no ronri* 場所の論理, or "logic of the predicate", *jutsugo no ronri* 述語の論理. This amounts to saying (what follows is not Nishida's proper argument, but my own) that the world is the total set of predicates by dint of which, through our senses, thoughts, words and actions, we grasp the reality of things; whereas Aristotelian logic amounts to saying that this reality precedes and founds such predicates. In this sense, it negates worldliness, and this is precisely, as Heidegger and Koyré have made clear, what the modern paradigm brings forth (i.e. it tends to reduce the world to a universal object).

Nishida's philosophy was deemed by his followers, the Kyoto school (*Kyôto gakuha* 京都学派), an "overcoming of modernity" (*kindai no chôkoku* 近代の超克).¹⁸ For what concerns us here, this "overcoming" consists in showing that identity cannot be reduced to an Aristotelian *topos*; it necessarily supposes a "place", *basho*, 場所 which is relational and therefore exceeds any individual *topos*, be it that of things or of persons.

The Nishidian concept of *basho* is in tune with both the Heideggerian concept of *Ausser-sich-sein* and the Taoist concept of *Da Xiang*. By the same token, these three concepts are incompatible with the paradigm of modernity in general, and with modern science in particular. It would be too long to show here that, in fact, Nishida's philosophy is not an overcoming but a reversal of modernity.¹⁹ However, the idea that worldliness is predicative, not substantial, gives us an essential clue for understanding why, in the concreteness of existence, the identity of persons and that of things intermingle creatively into one reality ; whereas the modern paradigm, by

¹⁷ The Latin etymology of *existence* means "to stay" (*stare*) "coming outside" (*ex*). That is, literally, to exceed the outer limit of one's material form. In other words, existence is relational and cannot be reduced to individual substances.

¹⁸ For a recent international discussion of this question, see Augustin BERQUE (ed.), *Logique du lieu et dépassement de la modernité (Logic of place and the overcoming of modernity)*, Brussels : Ousia, 2000, 2 vol.

¹⁹ This is because Nishida absolutized worldliness, which amounts to saying that predicates create their subjects, and that words produce the things they are about. This absolute constructivism is obviously false. For more arguments, see my *Écoumène. Introduction à l'étude des milieux humains*, Paris: Belin, 2000 (Japanese translation *Fûdogaku josetsu* 風土学序説, Tokyo : Chikuma Shobo, 2000).

juxtaposing the subjective and the objective, can only reduce the former to the latter, or the reverse.²⁰

Since Parmenidès (544-450 B.C.), the European vision of reality has stressed being and substance, whereas the Chinese one has stressed change and relation. Following the latter path, Nishida's philosophy is literally a negation of the European view, since it presupposes absolute non-being (*zettai mu* 絶対無) and its logic amounts to the change of A into non-A (the subject A becomes the predicate non-A). As a matter of fact, the logic of place is a translation, into modern philosophical terms, of a trend of ideas which, through Zen, owes much to both Buddhism and Taoism. Correlatively, Nishida's philosophy is in itself an expression of the tendency of the East Asian cultural sphere to enhance the predicativity of worldliness, instead of the substantiality of the object in itself - the *res extensa* in Descartes' terms, which amounts to matter.

This entails two basically different attitudes toward cultural heritage. The Europeans have been prone to protect the authenticity, matter and substance of material objects (e.g. buildings), whereas the Chinese have privileged the predicates of such things – first of all what is written about them, *wen* 文 (hence the very notion of culture, *wenhua* 文化, which literally means "change into writing", i.e. predication in written form). This is why even natural sites, for becoming (i.e. for "changing into") real landscapes, have to be celebrated by literature, not only in books but also expressed directly on the earth itself, through innumerable rock inscriptions.²¹ Only through this predication can they become a heritage, and be protected as such. But the same logic – the logic of the identity of the predicate – entails that the preservation of material forms is not important. It is for that reason that the Chinese can destroy so easily those built forms which, in Europe, would be preciously preserved, or, by the same token, build new ones with no consideration for what the Europeans would call "authenticity", i.e. that of the original matter.²²

The case of Ise in Japan, which we have seen above, expresses paradigmatically that same logic of the predicate. Rather than in the substance or the matter (cypress wood in this case), monumentality resides in the rite which, every twentieth year, performs anew the authenticity of the place (*basho*) of the shrine, encompassing both human actors and architectural forms in its predicative and dynamic identity. This is totally different from the modern conception of authenticity as embodied in the frozen matter or substance of an ancient building. Memory and continuity there is, but it is not substantial and it exceeds the *topos* of the building. That the rite is performed by living human actors indeed illustrates the fact that, as Simon Leys writes about China, "Permanence is not that which negates transformation, but that which informs it. Continuity is not secured through the immortality of inanimate objects, it is realised in the fluidity of the successive generations".²³

Yet we should not content ourselves with juxtaposing a Western paradigm of identity as embodied in substances,²⁴ and an Eastern one as embodied in predicates. This is first because, even in the West, monuments cannot do without human existence, and even in the East, rites or literature cannot do without matter. This is to say that, in fact, reality (*ρ*) is in both cases, though

²⁰ The limit of Nishida's logic of the identity of the predicate is that it cannot take into account the scientific evidence that the substance of things precedes their predication by human existence; this can be grasped only by the Aristotelian logic of the identity of the subject; which, in its turn, cannot take existence and worldliness into account. For truly overcoming modernity, we have to combine the two logics. The reality of human milieux, the total combination of which forms the ecumene, implies such a combination. For more arguments and concrete examples, see my *Écoumène*, *op. cit.* in note 19.

²¹ On this question, see Yolaine ESCANDE, 'Paysage chinois et inscription du lieu', p. 51-83 in Michel COLLOT, Baldine SAINT-GIRONS and Françoise CHENET (eds.), *Paysage : état des lieux* (*Landscape : the state of the place*), Brussels : Ousia, 2001.

²² For more detailed comparisons in this respect, see *Cahiers du réseau architecture/anthropologie*, 2, Paris : Éditions de la Villette, 1997, in which are collected several papers presented at the *International Conference on Urban Renewal in Chinese and European Traditional Cities* held in July 1995 successively in Quanzhou, Xi'an and Beijing.

²³ Simon LEYS, 'L'Attitude des Chinois à l'égard de leur passé (The attitude of the Chinese toward their past)', in *L'Humeur, l'honneur, l'horreur*, Paris : Robert Laffont, 1991 (1987), p. 35.

²⁴ That is in logical subjects. We must not forget that in Aristotelian logic, the word which expresses the notion of logical subject, *hupokeimenon*, means "that which lies under" (which is also the meaning of its Latin translation, *subjectum*); and that the Latin word *substantia* ("that which stands under") is a translation of the Greek *hupostasis*, which means the same. Substance and subject both imply matter as an original foundation: that upon which there can be predicates.

in different and variable proportions, a combination of an Aristotelian logic of the identity of the subject (S) with a Nishidian logic of the identity of the predicate (P); that is, $r = S/P$; which reads: *reality is a subject taken as a predicate*.²⁵

This conception of reality was anticipated by Zong Bing's principle, which we could understand in this light as: the reality (r) of a landscape is its intrinsic substance (S : 質) taken as certain representation (P : 靈). More specifically, it was anticipated, in Japanese aesthetics, by the principle of *mitate* 見立て, or "seeing as"; for example, seeing mount Hiei (比叡山: S), near Kyôto, as if it were mount Lu (廬山: P), in central China.

But this is not all. Modernity has imposed its technical systems, based mainly on the identity of S (since they derive from modern science), in the East as well as in the West. When combined with a tradition focussing on P , this can have tremendously disruptive effects, because there is, so to say, no *freezing* antidote to the *scrapping* effects of modernity. Hence, in the name of modernization, the massive destructions of the built environment which are now going on China, the scale of which exceeds by far any precedent in history, and which, for that reason, probably jeopardize even the Chinese capacity of *wenhua*. It really "kills the landscape", (*shafengjing* 殺風景), to borrow an expression devised by Li Shangyin (813-859), a poet of the Tang dynasty.

Conclusion

It has nowadays become evident that the reigning model of development is unsustainable on three grounds: 1. Ecologically, because of its disproportionate ecological footprint; 2. Ethically, because it entails growing inequalities; 3. Aesthetically, because it disrupts landscape. In formal terms, its antidote is preservation; but this only produces more incoherence between what is preserved and what is not, thus aggravating unsustainability, since a sustainable world cannot be incoherent. It must rely on a cosmic harmony between our existence and that of the things and other living beings around us. Landscape is that which expresses this harmony; and correlatively, "killing the landscape" is much more than an aesthetic problem: it concerns our very existence and the sustainability of our world. This is to say that it is a question of Being. Now, the ontological frame of modernity, which is based on the *topos* of individual substances (be they persons or things), is intrinsically limited to the individual, both in time and in space. It is, as such, intrinsically unable to ensure a real sustainability, going beyond the death, the destruction or the consumption of the individual. In other words, it can be nothing else than what Heidegger has termed "Being toward death" (*Sein zum Tode*).

In such an ontological frame, we can indeed transmit frozen objects from the past to the future, but we cannot transmit the living milieu of a really human existence; because the first expression of the modern paradigm, by way of dualism and mechanicism, is to negate the links which make a living human milieu.

Consequently, in order to ensure the sustainability of our world, we have to accomplish an ontological revolution, just like the Copernican revolution, which made modernity possible, was not only cosmological, but ontological as well, since it instituted reality as a set of objective data (an *Umgebung*, in Uexküll's terms) instead of our proper world (*Umwelt*), thus disrupting the relational set of existence. But as, of course, we cannot go *back* to premodern worldviews, what to have to do is to go *beyond* modernity. That is, we have to become conscious that reality is not a pure set of objects (pure S), abstracted from our own existence. Since we do exist, we necessarily "predicate" (through our ways of feeling, thinking, speaking and acting) these abstract objects (S) into the concrete reality of things (S/P).

This amounts to saying that reality is relational: it a set of ecological, technical and symbolic systems, which necessarily exceed the ontological *topos* of the individual subject or object, and integrate both in that same set of relations. By the same token, it exceeds the horizon of individual death: it is not a "Being toward death", but a "Being toward life" (*Sei e no sonzai* 生への存在), as Watsuji put it,²⁶ because such sets of relations (i.e. reality) are necessarily social, and do not cease at the moment of the individual's death. In other words, our Being is not only individual, but social as well; and for that reason, when we die, each of us can say, like Horatius put it, *non omnis moriar*, "I shall not die altogether". Indeed, our social "half" will remain alive not only in our name, our works etc., but in all those collective systems (e.g. language) which, concretely, were part of our existence and enabled our individual "half" to be really human.

²⁵ See above, note 19.

²⁶ Watsuji Tetsurô 和辻哲郎, *Fûdo 風土 (Human milieu)*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1935, chap. I.

Switching from the modern “Being toward death” to a “Being toward life”, taking into account the relational reality of human existence: this is the ontological revolution which we still have to make in order to ensure the sustainability of our world; first of all by giving, at last, a sound ontological ground to environmental ethics, which, in the ontological frame of individualism, can only remain forever an oxymoron.²⁷ “Killing the landscape”, for example, not only alters the external shape of objects; it affects our very existence, as human beings; and reciprocally, respecting the landscape is to respect the people who live there. To fully acknowledge this kind of moral argument, we need to overcome modern dualism, while, at the same time, we need to acknowledge the political principles of modern democracy. In the same way, in order to fully accomplish our duty toward the next generations, we need to acknowledge that it is our own social “half” which will survive the death of our individual “half”. This is to say that the first condition of the ontological revolution which we need is, by overcoming the modern ontological *topos*, to acknowledge and respect the relationality of Being.²⁸

Maurepas, 1st October 2007.

²⁷ As I have shown in *Être humains sur la Terre. Principes d'éthique de l'écoumène* (Being human on the Earth. Principles of ecumenal ethics), Paris : Gallimard, 1976.

²⁸ A former, somewhat different version of this paper was presented at the IGU (International geographical Union) conference on the cultural approach in geography “The preservation of ancient capitals and other historical cities”, Human Geography Institute, Xi'an Foreign Language University, 17-19 September 2001, under the title “Scrap or freeze : on the modern attitude toward urban forms and its possible overcoming”. For more on the present theme, see my articles “Being toward death, being toward life, and the Earth”, p. 263-278 in World Life Culture Forum, *Life thought and global sallim (livelihood) movement*, Seoul, Gyeong'gi Cultural foundation, 2006, 576 p. ; “Vers une mésologie – au delà du *topos* ontologique moderne”, p. 149-154 in Michel WIEWIORKA (dir.) *Les Sciences sociales en mutation*, Auxerre, Éditions Sciences humaines, 2007 ; and more generally, my book *Écoumène*, *op. cit.* in note 18. An international symposium on *Being toward life* is organized at Cerisy-la-Salle in 2008 (August 23-30). For attending this symposium, see www.ccic-cerisy.asso.fr .