

Readings from John Stilgoe's *Common Landscape of America*

1) **The Medieval Landschaft**

- A self-sustaining **cluster of dwellings** surrounded by concentric **arable fields**, at distances that all are walkable. Outside the arable land or fields is **wilderness**...
- The **wilderness** is the spatial representation of chaos, evil, bewilderment, danger, madness...
- Literally, **wylder ness** is an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning the *lair of the wild beast*.
- **The landschaft, then, was the alternative to danger and evil** - it represented order, agriculture, protection, civility, the Old Religion, and then the New Religion (Christianity)
- In the center of the landschaft was the **roland tree** that represented the life of this tenuous agricultural community. It was semi-sacred - an **axis mundi** for the community
- The agricultural land upon which the landschaft resided was owned by a **noble**. Nobles allowed workers or **serfs** to live on the land in exchange for a portion of crop or military service. This arrangement of *indentured servitude* with minimal rights (if any) was **feudalism**.
- Serfs were the workers tied to the land and the land was owned by nobles.  
The life of serfdom was not pleasant. The land that the serf lived on was owned by a lord or noble. The serf was obligated to work off the debt of being able to live on the land, either by agricultural production or military service - the agreement of indentured servitude a.k.a. serfdom.
- This arrangement essentially was the **feudalism** or **manorialism** of the early Middle Ages
- All these people were serfs (also known as peasants):
  - ¶ **free tenant** (peasants or tenant farmers), paid rent to lords, subject to fewer laws, taxed
  - ¶ **villein** or **cottar** paid rent to farmer - tied to land, taxed, moved their cottages
  - ¶ **serf** could not be bought and sold, but could be transferred with the land, taxed, built roads
  - ¶ **shepherd** took care of the flocks and lived in low-grade temporary shelter
  - ¶ **slaves** - no freedoms
- Three types of dwellings in the landschaft:
  - **dwelling** - an impermanent shelter for a laborer or shepherd
  - **cottage** - slightly more permanent. The cottage could be dismantled and moved
  - **house** or **homestead** - a dwelling that was permanent and could be owned apart from the noble. If one were lucky enough to hold one (own one), they became a **householder**
- Therefore, **spatial position** and **social position** was intimately tied to the landscape, which was adherent to common law

2) **Roads through the wilderness**

- Once nobles and landowners become aware that it was beneficial for them to connect their holdings, they, in fact, did connect them, by **building roads through the wilderness**...
- A new spatial, landscape-architectural awareness comes into play, along the path of the road - now the spatial form is **linear**, or **linearity**
- The **road** brings with it connotations and narratives that suggest *mystery, linearity, anonymity* (the anonymous traveler), *unknown places, romance of the road, traveling commerce, vitality from other places*... etc, etc...
- French word *vill* for cluster of dwellings becomes **village** now that it is connected to other villages outside of the *landschaft*
- This becomes the **dominant spatial organization** of medieval society
- And so the *village evolves into a town* and the *medieval town becomes the setting for the Gothic cathedrals to follow*.

3) **Landskip and Landscape (and then to America)**

- The Dutch word **landschap**, meaning painting of natural scenery, is garbled in English into **landskip**... meaning traditional Dutch scenery painting of the land. **landskip** becomes **landscape**...
- The connotations remain. Stilgoe states that there are *three types of landscape that are transferred to America* :: the **wilderness**; the **agricultural**; the **homestead & garden**