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**Spatial Aesthetics: Art as Transformative Experience
in Thomas Hardy's "Poems of 1912-13"**

Chih-chun Tang

felicityctang@gmail.com

Abstract:

Landscape, is something to be perceived with eyes, to be dwelled upon and to experience happiness. Getting an eyeful of places give a seasoning and spatial joie de vivre. There is more than eyes can espy, more than ears can detect. Settings and views are waiting to be explored. Things are in relation to surroundings, the sequences of events lead up the experiences and memories. The kind of vision appears in Thomas Hardy's "Poems of 1912-13." "Poems of 1912-13" are a series of elegies that Hardy composed after his wife Emma Gilford's eternal rest. Although the couple had long been set at odds, howbeit, Hardy embarked on his writing adventure about Emma. He unexpectedly made a hit with the memories of their love; wherefore, the "Poems 1912-13" are personification and reproduction of Hardy's mind. He defined the two real physical places where Emma and he used to live, id est, Cornwall and Dorset, not only as social but also psychological spaces. He inwardly overhauled and restored the spaces once familiar to him. Over and above, he dreamed up and brought his imaginary into existence with his late wife. As Hardy waded through the mental space and moved over the space of time, he also made the spaces emblematic and figurative like memorials. Like the idea of Gestalt's theory, the couple's life experiences are "essences or shapes of an entity's complete form." Both the poet and the phantom (Emma) become *flâneur*, the stroller in Walter Benjamin's meditation on nineteenth-century Paris, who is a characteristic and exemplary figure of freshness modernity.

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Keywords

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Art as transformative experience in Thomas Hardy's "Poems of 1912-13"

"Remember only this one thing," said Badger. "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.

That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves."

B. Lopez, *Crow & Weasel*

Introduction

Landscape, is something to be perceived with eyes, to be dwelled upon and to experience happiness. Getting an eyeful of places give a seasoning and spatial joie de vivre. There is more than eyes can espy, more than ears can detect. Settings and views are waiting to be explored. "Poems of 1912-13" are a series of elegies that Hardy composed after his wife Emma Gilford's eternal rest. Although the couple had long been set at odds, howbeit, Hardy embarked on his writing adventure about Emma. He unexpectedly made a hit with the memories of their love; wherefore, the "Poems 1912-13" are personification and reproduction of Hardy's mind. He defined the two real physical places where Emma and he used to live, id est, Cornwall and Dorset, not only as social but also psychological spaces. He inwardly overhauled and restored the spaces once familiar to him. Over and above, he dreamed up and brought his imaginary into existence with his late wife. As Hardy waded through the mental space and moved over the space of time, he also made the spaces emblematic and figurative like memorials. He was so attached to the places that he made the places allegorical. Ergo, Hardy kept his memory alive by roaming about in the real and imaginary land he once travelled. Like the idea of Gestalt's theory, the couple's life experiences are "essences or shapes of an entity's complete form." Both the poet and the phantom (Emma) become *flâneur*, the stroller in Walter Benjamin's meditation on nineteenth-century Paris, who is a characteristic and exemplary figure of freshness modernity.

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The environment is to condense information from the surrounding array of light. It implies the information in a place not only consists of forms and colors but also invariants. "Environment" traditionally had an austere, sober meaning. It was often taken to designate a "state of being encompassed or surrounded"(OED). In *Ecological approaches to visual perception*, however, the American Psychologist James. J. Gibson maintains that environment implies the "value" and "meanings" of things (127). As a result, it becomes possible to conceptualize environment in less tangible terms. While surrounding is perceived as perceptual and affective, as much as physical space, experiences could also be construed as space& environment, a point amply supported by Hardy's "Poems of 1912-13," as I intend to argue in this paper. The perfect way to across invisible boundaries is to keep walking. A *flâneur* is always roaming and rambling in the poems. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *flâneur* refers to "a loungeur or a saunterer, an idle 'man about town'. In "Poems of 1912-13", the man for that reason becomes a *flâneur* and the places once he stayed at become habitats for him. Walter Benjamin draws on the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, who makes this figure as an characteristic paradigm of metropolitan, contemporary experience. In *The Arcades Project*, he perceives that *flâneurs* bear and favor to ostracize themselves and idle around all day in a idiosyncratic world: "To live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider's web, in whose toils world events hang loosely suspended like so many insect bodies sucked dry" (*Arcades* 216). Au contraire, *flâneurs* are strollers in a tranquil and serene cosmos inside or outside of the globe. The space in which they wander about is paradoxically both concrete and figurative: while approachable and explicit, it encompasses extraordinary assemblages of awareness. To a degree, Benjamin construes the arcades as "a street of lascivious commerce only; it is wholly adapted to arousing longings and cravings. Because in this street the juices slow to a standstill, the commodity burgeons along the margins and enters into fantastic sequences and solutions, like the tissue in tumors" (*Arcades* 42). While commerce is epitomized as prostitutes, traffic flow grows into lifeless water with color ("juices"), and commodity is equated and related to "tissue in tumors." These images have the spooky and eerie quality of surrealist paintings. In other words, in *flâneurs* one-of-a-kind cosmos, they are participant-observers and creators of their own world.

The male speaker in the poem is *flâneur-like* "surveys around, the familiar ground" of places he once stayed at. In "The Walk," the poet catches sight of the woman's absence as he scrutinizes of "you did not walk with me" (49). Scrutinizing the absence of the woman, the narrator has the appearance to grasp and perceive crowd & phenomenon in the corners through the intuitional and

visceral process while appreciating its different angles. The male speaker intimately and closely views the surroundings as if he was looking at their image in a mirror. His recollections on the yesteryear are intensely and lovingly engaged. He recalls the woman's absence from an excursion. He gives a sense for "She was weak and lame, so she never came." Granted and assumed she was physically ill-equipped on that day, it is peculiar and curious that her absence is still keenly and severely experienced years afterwards. A corresponding circumstance emerges in the man's return and call to Beeny Cliff, where he has vision flashes of "the woman riding high above with bright hair flapping free" (62). The image of the woman he recalls as one "whom I loved so, and who loyally loved me" (62) must have been so passionately embedded on his memory that a fragmentary and sketchy trace in the landscape would readily evoke memories of a once-lived-in world. While the gaze is aimed and assisted at the woman in these visions, the narrator himself is inevitably implicated as a *flâneur* whose look outward is almost always simultaneously an "active and intellectual" stare and glance inward as well (Burton 1).

Maps trace the formation of the places. Physical maps give insight into the physical features of places. Maps, therefore, represent geographical areas in a way that enable the poet finds places and to understand the features of the places. With fluid - boundaries part of it, as much imaginative as geographical, Thomas Hardy called after the Dark Age kingdom of the West Saxons: Wessex. Hardy's Wessex includes geographical scenes in "Poems of 1912-13". To the east it reaches to Winchester, and to London beyond. To the west, to Cornwall. Cornwall, the place, has in fact been characterized for identical "spatial practices" with Wessex in Hardy's poetries. There was a kingdom called "Wessex" in ancient Anglo-Saxon history. Hardy made use of its history; he unified and integrated the lore of west southern counties into the Wessex legend. For Hardy, Wessex, as he claimed and stressed, was meant to be any and every place, a region plainly local at any rate literally universal. It is a distinguishing place in history and a spot on the map of England, as well as virtually and essentially anyplace else in the world. An English writer, Molly Lefebure, formerly brought up that Hardy's Wessex is truly real "vanishing Wessex, perhaps lost Wessex." Withal, Hardy's readers often lay hands on his pages what comes across as a fairly true record of that vanished life. Lefebure observed that "The description of these backgrounds has been done from the real" (31). That is, the space in the "Poems of 1912-13" is partly real and half imagined. Whereas the real grounds the space in history, the imagined is emblematic of a certain rhetorical function it present.

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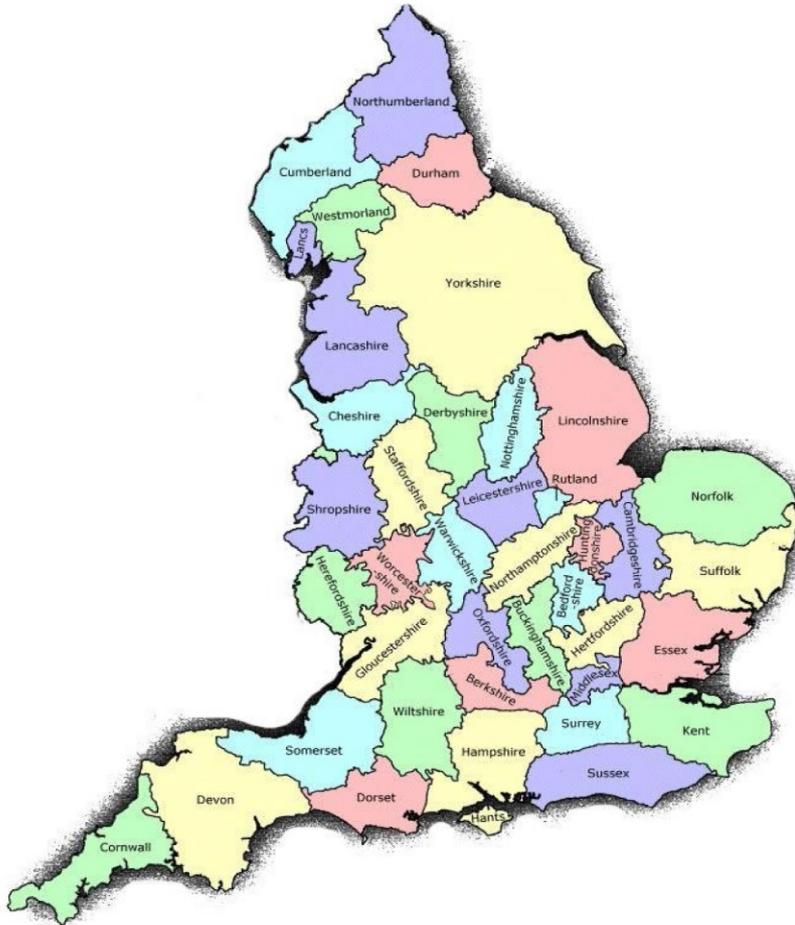


Figure 1. Physical Map of England

Thus, the narrator in the poems describes a psychological analysis that he overlooks with the woman & phantom to review their mental representation of the places. He illustrates that physical images/mental images and facts of existence are clumsily linked. Stanley Milgram renders images appreciable and discernible. Though concept people suppose cities are nonverbal but they own their spatial ideas; cities and places are not easily interpreted and explained into words. As a result, the man and the woman in "Poems of 1912-13" readily meld public and private facets of life through the systems of places and landmarks. To the couple, properties of the mental places are possible to be changed since they differ from the valid spatial correlatives but they conserve a topological sequence. The poet's cognitive processes land then enter in the mental map selectivity. Neither the map nor the places are just collections of objects; they

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Figure 3. Thomas Hardy's England

The niche concept applies insights to the understanding of Hardy's perceptual processes. Wessex therefore is in relation to which the couple is habituated in their behavior. James J. Gibson evolves and develops a visceral and perceptual theory of "affordances". This is a new stage he embraces for the critical approach in a weighty view of how interactive environment gives prominences to indicate the behaviors an organism may perform. In Gibson's *Ecological Approaches to Visual Perception*, he affirms that "a niche is a set of affordances" (Gibson, *Perception* 128) and affordances "are properties of the environment relative to an animal (Gibson, *Perception* 285). In Thomas Hardy's "Poems of 1912-13", the places the poet visited are therefore the couple's niche. The surroundings are "properties of the environment relative" to the male narrator. The woman in the poem perhaps is influenced by the environment & surroundings, she foresees their estranged relationship and "often dreams of the dangerous pathways over cliffs and rocks leading to spot almost inaccessible" (*Recollections* 7). In the

ecological view, understanding the constraints and opportunities offered by affordances requires recognition of reciprocities between organisms' perception and environmental features that together form the context of an environmental event. Namely, sea, rocks and cliff seek for objectify perceptual processes and complementarities between the Hardy couple and the ground.

In "After a Journey," the narrator makes a pilgrimage to Pentargan Bay, north Cornwall, a place/ a niche the couple frequented visited in the days of courting. The ghost of the woman (the affordance) guides the man through their "olden haunts" is however bereft of voice. In the autumn of their life, the couple grew apart from each other, or so he imagines her saying. Or, actually, he speaks for her. Reaching the waterfall (affordance), the man seems to have perceived from "the cave just under". The narrator does not have a sturdy grasp of the woman's cry, as it only "seems" to call out to him from an interval. The ghostly sound of the woman's is as a medium as those of the affordances. The longing for the woman, bounds up with that setting, helps to recall the man's memory. The poet makes it so. He creates the world he perceives in an illustration, however, the existence of optical information that is rigorous and identical.

"Each dialogue begins with the person recording his or her feelings about home in a visual image" (Marcus 6). Perceiving is for implementation. Clare Cooper Marcus delves into the weighty and abstruse relationship between humans and their habitats. In Marcus sight, "Home" is nothing about architectural styles, floor plans, or structural cohesion. She reads and scrutinizes the conditions the factors mirror self image and emotional well-being. Similarly, "Home", for Hardy has intimate and composite constituents like an infinite unknown. Trained and equipped as an architect in Hardy's early years, he drew in a debate regarding the preservation of Gothic churches. The debate met and gathered on whether the medieval architecture should be preserved in its ruinous state, or restored and even enhanced in accordance with an idealized form. In "Memories of Church Restoration," Hardy spoke in favor of preservation. He stood and suggested for "preservation of memories, fellowships, fraternities" (215). Hardy convicted rehabilitation for introducing a "rupture of continuity," which for him was "tragic and deplorable" (215).

Something is bound to be lost despite all preservation efforts. Even if the ancient architectures and buildings are kept unblemished, tears and voices will not stay. At the ceremony celebrating the freedom of Dorchester, Hardy indicated and revealed on the contradiction between the Dorchester of his adolescence and the existing town: Our power to preserve is largely an illusion. Where is the Dorchester of my early recollection – I mean the human Dorchester – the kernel – of which the houses were but the shell? ... I see the streets and turnings not far different from those of my school-boy time; but the faces that used to be seen at

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the doors, the inhabitants, where are they? I turn up the Weymouth Road, cross the railway-bridge, enter an iron gate to "a slope of green access", and there they are! There is the Dorchester that I knew best; there are the names on white stones one after the other, names that recall the voices, cheerful and sad, anxious and indifferent, that are missing from the dwellings and pavements. (Florence Hardy, *Later Years* 146)

Complementary dilemmas occurs in "Poems of 1912-13". By flashing and awakening the residues of lived experience in the poet's "home", namely, Cornwall and Dorset, "Poems of 1912-13" constitutes a kind of restoration project itself. Rebuilt from the places/homes of bygone days, his poetic memory sight and edifice reflects his inner self. So is his "home."

To conclude, "house as mirror of self." The man keeps wandering in either the physical places or the psychical space, striving to find his "home". The journey forward always means the journey back. Through the poet's life, the places /his home and their contents are potent statement who he is. It represents emblems of the man's individual and his existence. Image of homes are therefore analyzed to explore the couple's relationship between the physical environment and the spirit. That is to say, the couple's relationship to their home is actually life encounter, a counterpart of psyche. The places and the phantom (woman) therefore present as mediums connecting memories to the couple's bygone life in the abyss of despair. Home remains either in physical environment or in intimate memories; it will ultimately reemerge and recur again by exploring the surrounded stories.

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