

What Does It Mean to Replace Ecology with Mesology and Resources with Nourishment?

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Abstract

After having explored what is at stake in Berque's efforts to overcome the pitfalls of a Western paradigm characterized by dualism between nature and culture and the conception of a substantial and abstract subject, I will show to what extent his notions of mesology and mediance help us think through the ecological crisis which cannot be reduced to issues such as global warming and the depletion of resources, but which concerns our perception of ourselves, our relationships with others and the meaning of our temporary stay on earth.

The replacement of ecology by mesology leads to my own approach which is to make interaction with nature and other beings a chapter of a philosophy of existence that takes into account the materiality of our life, that is to say the fact that we live in and depend upon natural and cultural things such as water, food, river, trees, but also landscapes and towns. This phenomenology of nourishment highlights the corporality of the subject and insists upon the dimension of pleasure and enjoyment. The phenomenological description of eating, dwelling, walking, living in a place and being co-resident with other human and non-human existences, breathes new life into the concept of human existence. I shall further outline the political consequences of this phenomenology.

Keywords: dualism, ecology, existence, mesology, nourishment, phenomenology

要旨

ベルクの研究は、自然と文化および実体と抽象の概念という西洋の2分法をいかに乗り越えるかという課題に取り組むことであった。ベルクの提唱するメゾロジー（風土論）とメディアンズ（風土性）は、現代のエコロジー

に新たな光を照射した。地球温暖化や資源枯渇問題に限定するのではなく、我々の知覚、他者との関係、地球に住まうことの意味をも含めて包括的に論じるのである。

エコロジー（環境）をメゾロジー（風土）と捉えることにより、自然と他の存在物の相互関係を、新たな視点に立って、存在論的に論じることが可能となった。我々は実際に水、食料、河川、樹木、さらには風景、都市のような自然と文化の造形物の中で、ともに生活をしているのである。食物をめぐる現象は主体の身体性に結びついており、快楽と歓びと深く関わる。食、住、歩行、人々との暮らし等の現象の記述は、人間存在の概念に新たな生命を吹き込むのである。さらに本論ではこれらの現象の政治的側面についても論じる。

キーワード：二元論、エコロジー（環境）、存在、メゾロジー（風土）、食物、現象

1. Introduction

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to meet Augustin Berque. Not only does his conception of mediance and mesology refresh our understanding of our relationship with nature and our inhabiting the earth, but he also translated *Fûdo* of Watusji (2011) and made it available to the French public.

Berque and Watusji open the way to a new phenomenology that is characterized by the taking into account of spatiality. Nature is no longer an object nor something external to our life, as seen with the concept of trajection that highlights the co-institution of man and nature and the link between historicity and space.

Moreover, human beings are no longer considered as individuals cut off from the ecological, cultural and technical milieu they live in and depend upon. This reinterpreting of our immersion in our milieu does not only aim at overcoming the dualism between nature and culture that prevents us from effective answers to the ecological crisis, it also affects the way we think of our relationship with others.

By reading *Fûdo* of Watsuji and by following Berque in his effort to overcome an abstract, substantial, disembodied conception of the subject, considered apart from the ecological, technical and cultural conditions of our existence, we pave the way for a phenomenology that is no longer focused on the individual dimension of existence. This is why it is new, compared to Heidegger's understanding of the human condition, for instance in *Being and Time* (1927).

We human beings live a dual existence. We have our personal life and endeavours, but our individual death is not the end of the world. The latter welcomes us when we are born and it will last after our individual deaths, as Arendt (1983: 95) said. This world, which is common to past, current and future generations, also entails cultural and natural beauty. Therefore ethics does not only concern individuals. In our daily life, when we are cold, or when we enjoy the summer, we are referring to the public world, to the traditions, to the habits and tools we have in common with other people. In a nutshell, instead of relying on an individualistic conception of our *in-der-Welt-sein* (Being in the world), such a phenomenology refreshes our understanding of our relationship with nature, our inhabiting the earth, our cohabitation with other human beings and other living beings, and the meaning of the word 'world'. This is also what we find in the Japanese *Ningen*, which refers to the person, but also to the community. The same with *yo no naka*. *Yo* refers to *aida*, between, and *naka*, within (Watsuji 2003: 24). The conception of the human being as an individual (*hito*) is a fiction.

I would like to further explore what is at stake in Berque's efforts to overcome the pitfalls of a Western paradigm that comes from modernity. This paradigm is characterized by the dualism I mentioned above and the conception of a substantial and abstract subject. These pitfalls have a twofold dimension since they are theoretical and practical, that is to say that they have ecological, social, existential and political consequences. Berque insisted very clearly in his lecture on the theoretical aspect of his critique of the modern paradigm. I will insist on the practical aspects.

The point is not only to underscore the dramatic consequences of a dualistic line of thought but rather to show to what extent Berque's notions of mesology and mediance renew our understanding of our inhabiting the earth. Could these notions help us think through the ecological and social crisis? We have to

acknowledge that such a crisis is also a crisis of subjectivity, that is to say that it concerns our perception of ourselves, our way of inhabiting the earth, our relationships with the others and the meaning of our temporary stay on earth. It cannot be simply reduced to issues such as global warming, the depletion of resources and biodiversity, although these issues are looming challenges. I think that Berque's approach can help us to better understand the ecological crisis we are confronted with. I will try to say why. In the second part, I will say a few words on my own phenomenological approach, which I have developed in several books, especially in *Les Nourritures. Philosophie du corps politique* (2015).

2. Mediance, mesology, trajection, ecumene and chora in Berque

The lecture Berque gave contains some of the ideas already developed in his books, such as *Écoumène* (2000). He also insisted on the lessons we can borrow from the Japanese language and its ternary structure that does not permit taking nature as an object and man as a subject (or a *cogito*) considered as a substance independent from the conditions that enable us to live (from space, for instance, and more precisely from our milieu, that is to say from a cultural, social, technical, spatial and historical *Umwelt* or *fûdo* we live in).

Unlike the concept of environment, *Umbegung*, (*shinzen kankyo*), the concept of *fûdo*, *Umwelt*, means that we constitute *it* as much as *it* constitutes us. Our predicates, that is to say our customs, our representations frame *fûdo*. Conversely, our identity and our history are framed by it. The word 'trajection' conveys such co-institution, which also implies that contingency plays an important part. This has nothing to do with any conception of a rooted self whose identity would be defined by the soil and the blood. Berque's notion of trajection avoids the nationalistic trend we can sometimes find in the Kyôto School. This is why his insistence upon the ternary structure of the Japanese language which avoids subjectivism as well as reductionism is very important.

To illustrate the overcoming of any dualism between nature/culture, subject/object, we could refer to the notion of landscape, which implies our considering the climate, the soil, but also the fact that a landscape refers to the person who sees and contemplates it, as seen in paintings. The objective and the subjective dimensions of the landscape go hand in hand with one another (Besse 2009).

However, my aim is not to repeat Berque. My goal is rather to show why his work could help us think through the ecological crisis by reframing it as an existential crisis, whereas other approaches in environmental ethics have failed. For this, we have to notice that the replacement of ecology by mesology is a consequence of the introduction of the notion of mediance (*mesos, medietas*). The overcoming of the dualism between nature and culture requires also the rejection of the understanding of freedom we find in Descartes and Kant till Rawls. These thinkers consider freedom as an overcoming of nature. The human being is for them an empire in an empire, as Spinoza said (1994). The world is separated from nature and the part geography plays in history is not acknowledged since history and politics are seen as if they only refer to human beings and nations. This is acosmism.

Not only does this acosmism have theoretical and epistemological drawbacks, not only does it prevent us from respecting nature as the condition of our freedom, it also prevents us from providing relevant guidelines that would help us deal with the challenges we are confronted with. Lastly, it explains why environmental ethicists failed.

The latter did not succeed in fostering individuals to make the changes in their lifestyles that are required to reduce their ecological footprint. For the same reason, they did not manage to make ecology a political platform. The reason for such failure is the following: in spite of their critique of anthropocentrism and their efforts to grant moral consideration to other living beings, or even to grant nature a non instrumental value, they shared a dualistic approach with the same philosophy of the subject they had rejected.

The philosophy of the subject that still underlies the social contract from Hobbes to Rawls insists upon an atomistic conception of the self and upon (negative) freedom. This line of thought still characterizes Heidegger's *Being and Time* (2010). For this philosophy, freedom is all important and nature is just a trampoline for human projects. On the contrary, for environmental ethicists, especially for those who pertain to eco-centrism, such as Leopold (1949), nature is all important. The point of departure of ecological politics is the acknowledgment of ecological norms such as the reduction of demography or the acceptance of the intrinsic value of ecosystems, as seen in Arne Næss (2013: 85). However, by doing so, environmental ethicists beg the question: these norms are easily accepted

by ecologists, but they cannot enable us to reach an overlapping consensus and to define public policies in a pluralistic democracy. Moreover, nothing has changed in our lifestyles, even when it is acknowledged that ecosystems have a non-instrumental value and that animals are not machines (Pelluchon 2011).

Environmental ethics and animal ethics deal with the moral, if not legal, status of non-human beings and ecosystems and borrow from such studies some criteria that enable a denunciation of humankind's exploitation of nature and animals. I think that the ethical and political failure of animal and environmental ethicists is due to their point of departure: they start with the other beings instead of considering that nature and animals *belong to our lives* and that *politics is a cosmopolitics and a zoopolitics*. On the contrary, when we study ecology as a chapter of a philosophy of existence, which is the approach fostered by Berque's notion of mesology, we can pave the way for an ethics which can provide guidelines for fostering respect for nature and animals as well. Ecology can no longer be a separated field, but it is part of a philosophy of existence. This is already the bridge to my own work in *The Nourritures* (2015). It was actually my point of departure.

To make the interaction with nature and other beings a chapter of a philosophy of existence is at stake in the replacement of ecology by mesology. It drove me to taking seriously the materiality of our existence, that is to say the fact that we live in and depend upon natural and cultural things, such as water, food, river, trees, but also bridges, landscapes and towns.

Such an approach leads also to a reassessment of the meaning of architecture, as Berque says. To live somewhere is to feel at ease in a place which is not used to "park people" as if they were cars, as Illich (2005) noticed by using a metaphor to describe the loss of common sense in urban areas. By the same token, we cannot consider that space is only a *topos*, that is to say a geometric space. The oblivion of chora which conveys, as in Plato, the idea of the genesis stands for this acosmism which leads to building places where it is not possible to live well and to feel at home (Derrida 1993).

Lastly, when Watsuji (2011) says that mediance is “the structural moment of human existence”, he suggests that we are never alone. To live is to live with the others, to experience the *aida* (Pelluchon 2015: 85). There is a very beautiful passage in *Fûdo*, in which Watsuji (2011) describes the experience of being cold. When I am cold, I do not aim at the cold. It is not an object nor a noem. We can no longer understand such a phenomenon as if it were the result of our intentionality. This means that the phenomenology we use is different from the one we find in Husserl. It is no longer a phenomenology of the constitution, as I say in *Les Nourritures* (2015: 91-92), quoting Levinas who put into crisis the representation by describing phenomena that escape our intentionality (such as pain, growing old and so on). Moreover, when I am cold or when it is raining, I am always referring to the others since I wear a pullover or take an umbrella. Our daily life, that is to say the description of our existence in its materiality, points out that the subject is no longer to be understood in light of Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum*. The self is always relational and embodied. Moreover, in the Japanese language, the subject is always situational. Berque shows us that such a way of thinking does not fit any objective statement. I would add that it fits phenomenology, which is neither reductionist nor subjectivist.

3. The phenomenology of nourishment and its political consequences

Let me develop this idea by referring to my own work which is in tune with that of both Berque and Watsuji. Like Berque, I try to overcome the dualism between nature and culture and other relying dualisms (object/subject, mind/body, reason/emotion). I also focus on spatiality and not only on time. However, my specific contribution to an understanding of human existence considered in its materiality is to highlight the corporality of the subject, which takes place in a phenomenology of the non-constitution whose paradigm is the nourishment. We shall see what is at stake in the description of eating but also in the replacement of resources by nourishment.

I am also in tune with Watsuji since he tried to substitute Heidegger’s ontology and his *Sein zum Tode*, another understanding of the human condition which insists on the dual dimension of our existence and which goes hand in hand with the primacy of life over death, replacing our obsession for our individual deaths by the commitment to preserve the common world from destruction and to

transmit it to future generations. I will draw the political consequences of such a phenomenology of nourishment, for which to live is to live in, and depend upon the world and to live with, and for the others.

Nourishment is the word I use to speak of the natural and cultural things I live in and depend upon. It is a way of avoiding the word 'resources' that reduces the world and nature to tools and means to our ends, as in Heidegger. Not only do I highlight the environmental and social conditions of my existence, but I also insist upon the dimension of pleasure and enjoyment that is linked to our existence. The phenomenological description of eating, dwelling, walking, living in a place and being co-residents with other human and non-human animals, breathes new life into the concept of human existence. Not only is the subject embodied and dependent on natural and cultural things that nourish his or her life, giving it taste, the subject is also always relational.

For sure, these things I live in and depend upon correspond to my needs, but I am immediately looking for the taste of food when I am eating. I eat in order to eat and to enjoy food, and not to live, as Levinas (1994) says. Existence is not understood in light of the struggle for life or the project as in Heidegger. Life is loved for itself. It is a pleasure to live, as seen with the young human and non-human babies who have pleasure in playing, as if life were more generous than what we imagine when referring to the plans of life, to the projects. (Pelluchon 2015: 43). We might have forgotten this originary love for life, but dereliction is originary only in a philosophy for which my individual death is the end of the world and whose obsession for power leads to overvalue *Entschlossenheit* - resolution. I think that Watusji understood this very well.

The nourishment, the natural and cultural things I live in and depend upon, are not objects nor noems. Not only do I incorporate them, but they nourish my life. They give it meaning and taste. Such a phenomenology of nourishment highlights the corporality of the subject, the fact consciousness is not the sole origin of the meaning and that our body is the starting point of our experience of the world which is an immersion in the sensitive world. It corresponds to my needs, but it also pleases me. This is why eating is the paradigm of this philosophy of sensations that describes our being with the world and makes aesthetics enter ethics.

The description of eating shows that we are always connected to current, past and future persons and with other animals, since our consumption has an impact on them. When I am eating, I am never alone, even if nobody shares my bread, because my lifestyles and habits have an impact upon the other human and non-human beings. I foster this or that production and distribution, this or that kind of agriculture and breeding. While eating, I am also connected to people living in poor countries where many suffer from hunger or malnutrition. We know that the growing demand for meat explains why cereals produced in Africa are sold for American or European cattle, not to mention the use of land for cotton or any other product sold to rich countries. Instead of fostering local agricultures, the rules of the market explain in part that about one billion people are still starving to death, whereas two billion are suffering from malnutrition. Famine is not an issue of shortage - a technical problem that could be solved by increasing the production of food with pesticides and GMOs, it is a matter of justice. This phenomenology of eating goes hand in hand with an inquiry into the meaning of agriculture and its role in culture (a phenomenology of agriculture). Likewise, the way I try to politicize the question of animal welfare leads to speak of justice *towards* animals and this goes further than issues concerning their rights.

When I am eating, I state the importance I leave to other human and non-human beings. I state whether they have the right to live and to flourish. Ethics is not a normative discipline, but it is a matter of self-limitation. Ethics refers to the limits I set upon my right to use whatever is good for my own preservation for the sake of future and current persons and animals. Therefore, ethics does not begin with the encounter with the other's face. Not only is it extended to future generations and animals, but it also makes sense once I eat. This way of stressing the ethical dimension of eating cannot be found in Levinas (1994) who instead thinks that there is a break between enjoyment and justice, between my immersion in the sensitive world and ethics that starts with the encounter of the other human being.

Eating is a statement. It has an affective, social and cultural dimension, but also an ethical and political one. Ethics makes sense once I am eating, since my lifestyles show whether I am prone to set limits on my right to use whatever pleases me for the sake of other human and non-human beings. Likewise, birth is a structure of existence that does not prove our facticity, as in Heidegger (2010), but instead

installs inter-subjectivity inside the subject. Lastly, to live is to share space and nourishment with other human beings, but also with other animals, whose existence puts me into question and raises issues of justice.

The description of other structures of existence (dwelling, to live somewhere and then to coexist, to be born) shows that the subject is always relational. In my life, there are the lives of the others, be they my ancestors or future generations who will bear the burden of global warming and climate change. Justice is not essentially understood as the fair allocation of resources, but the principles of a theory of justice as sharing nourishment, taking into account the interests of future generations, the irreversibility of some technologies (such as nuclear energy), the ethological norms of animals which set limits to our right to use and abuse them, and the right of any being to have access to food and water.

In a nutshell, the embodied and relational subject, which refers in my last book (Pelluchon 2015: 44-52, 72-74) to “the gourmand cogito” and “the born cogito”, renews the meaning of ethics and justice and our inhabiting the earth and it leads to replace the philosophy of the subject that still grounds political liberalism in another conception of our being-with-the-world-and-the-other which has far-reaching political implications. This creates the link between the first part of the book (A phenomenology of nourishment) and the second (Establishing a common world).

Starting from eating, I draw the political implications of this philosophy of corporality. The social contract can no longer be understood as in Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau or Rawls, who ground their political theories upon an abstract, individualistic and more or less disembodied subject, whose freedom is only limited by the freedom of other current human beings. Such a political frame cannot help us answer the ecological crisis, which is not reduced to depletion of resources and biodiversity, but refers to a crisis of the subjectivity and our being-with-others. I try to provide guidelines that aim at reconstructing democracy so that ecology, the alleviation of animal suffering, but also conviviality may enter politics, supplementing representative democracy with a non-representative system and indicating the conditions of an evolution from a competitive democracy towards a more deliberate model that could also make citizens take part in decision-making.

Such an embodied, relational subject provides the philosophical foundation for another political theory in which the goals of the State can no longer be reduced to security and the reduction of unfair inequalities. The protection of the finite biosphere, the alleviation of animal suffering, the concern for future generations and the consideration of all the dimensions that enable us to flourish, and not only to survive, frame a new social contract which corresponds to the normative aspect of such an ambitious political theory, which we could compare to the work of an architect: whereas the phenomenology of nourishment stands for the foundations and plays the part that the fiction of a natural state played in Rousseau ([1762] 2001), *The Social Contract*, which establishes the criteria of politics and is linked to a theory of justice (with nine principles), represents the pillar. Lastly, the chapters that deal with the conditions of a reconstruction of democracy and refer to institutional but also cultural innovations that could enable us fulfil the promises entailed in the new social contract can be compared to the roof.

4. Conclusion

My contribution to the current debates on landscape and environment does not pertain to environmental ethics. I rather develop an ontology that has nothing to do with Heidegger's ontology of *Sorge*. Such a phenomenology of nourishment renews the meaning of our being-with-the-world-and-with-the-others. I then draw the political consequences of such philosophy, advocating a reconstruction of politics and even democracy. I know that such an enterprise is very ambitious, but I was lucky to read such an inspirational thinker as Berque, whom again I thank for his works and for having translated Watsuji.

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