Territories of Transvaluation

Left in the audible dark, listening to the crackling sound of forest, slowly coming to the phase of existence that is vision, following earthy grounds constituting a landscape of the informe — a beyond form. The film Shape Shifting *composes a territory imbued with activity. The 16 mm film activates a specific sensation of color, sound and movement of different territories and different scales. Over almost 20 minutes the images give a poetic, slow and heterogeneous account of a particular Japanese landscape, satoyama, and the way it activates human and more-than-human engagements. Color becomes a refrain for the viewer creating a close entanglement between color-tonalities of the landscape and their effects as imprints on the celluloid. The shapes of the landscape are under constant negotiation. The camera follows the different human engagements with the rural land, slow, manual, sometimes machine-enhanced encounters, shifting radically the scape through burning fields of grassland, or digging up the earth. Left alone the images depict a curiosity for the trans-species and trans-material circulations and the way they seem to proceed in resonance on the same ground. The camera moves from grassland to forest, to close-ups of flora and fauna, to farming activities, from interiors of rural homes to the structures of a biomass power plant without any strict linearity. Its gestures are round, swift and gentle. The only straight line occurs when the camera appears to be a pig's point of view searching the territory. Sound and image create their very own refrains throughout the film resisting any sense of homogeneity.*

Relation takes precedence over concrete form, reference or representation. Traces of representation, however, are not absent. At some point the rural impressions of sweeping gestural color-images jumps into its economic envelope, the vegetable market, the labor of farming and appropriation of the land, of building and constructing. The representational envelope of value extraction, of some sort of exchange and transformation from land to commodity, perishes again once the images return to close-ups of blossoms and scenes dominated by the sound of wind. However, through its focus on rhythm, there is no antagonism between "natural" and "human" or "technological" image contents. Their relation is not necessarily one of clash and contrast but of mutual inclusion beyond a human-nature divide. The territory that manifests its presence through the images comes alive through many micro-cuts constituting heterogeneous series of movements such as solar panels with cars in the background, workers building a charcoal burner, a frog sitting on a human palm. Everywhere we move with the traces of activity, along different zones of mutual engagement. But instead of an account "after the fact" the images feed forward into a different, sensuous, mode of activation. The relay between the action at a temporal distance and the filmic affection creates a new territory. The values of labour, appropriation, and harnessing of energies through nature gives way to another set of values that are more-than-human and beyond quantification or representation. Through the specific rhythms of Shape Shifting, *the film opens an aesthetic register of the territory as composition, a sonorous composition of polyrhythmic qualities, a territory that expresses itself in waves and undulations forming series ready to be taken up in another context thus constituting a different, transversal, process of making new (existential) territories of sensation.*

Introduction

Shape Shifting activates a relaying of processes of territory-making while preserving the singular rhythm of a territory. The notion of the territory immediately evokes the question of its composition, its dynamics and transformation. How is a territory neither a definite place nor an abstract space? It is here, where I see the main concern when it comes to the question of the territory as an active and dynamic field for relations of different strata to conjunct. A territory never comes as one but always as more-than-one, as a field crossed and constituted by the movements of "populations, packs and colonies, collectives and multiplicities."[1] To a certain extent a territory is a relational field with geographical traits: "Geographical areas can only harbour a sort of chaos, or, at best, extrinsic harmonies of an ecological order, temporary equilibriums between populations."[2] The relation between populations appears as central figure. The concept of populations undergoes a crucial shift from a societal context of the human toward a more-than-human register.[3] This shift allows to open up registers of material, organic and affective kinds. But how then, can we cope with this quasi chaos of these geographical areas in a world that tends to move far from equilibrium? When dealing with a particular yet generic territory, for instance that of the Japanese satoyama, I wonder how one can account for its temporary equilibriums as being unbounded and yet capable of relating to its "extrinsic harmonies of an ecological order?" Asking further, in which way does the notion of ecology afford a transformation in relation to what it includes, again, moving far from equilibrium beyond a romantic notion of harmony? Put differently, if a territory is a composition of a constitutional power for relations to occur in their conjunctive capacities, the ecological impetus asks, how to make ecology an open process of transvaluation? Transvaluation names the constant shifting of modalities in the composition of a territory generating its very dynamics and by that rendering its capacities to relate graspable.

In resonance with *Shape Shifting* the question of the territory extends its scope beyond a reduced natural ecology in relation to human appropriation towards an utterly inhumane dimension, which one might call aesthetic. Aesthetic as a realm of the inhumane defines the very field of relations composing the way a territory holds together without being finitely bound. Beyond the use-value or human-nature relation between humans and the land, the aesthetic dimension of the more-than-human seeps through the filmic expression of *Shape Shifting*, taking account of the circulation of values that cannot be subsumed under human categories.

Shape Shifting, the way I relate to this film, marks an investigation into the more-than-human values imbued within a territory. A territory that, to follow Bernard Cache's elaborations on spatio-temporal dynamics and memory, is not defined by identity but by a certain specificity.[4] This difference, I hope to illustrate along the way, is crucial if one wants to evade a substantialist account of a place. The audio-visual appearance of satoyama, in other words, provides a segue into thinking territories as expressive of dynamic processes of transvaluation which are specific without being identitarian. The crucial difference at stake is a thinking of the territory as open plane for different forces to insert themselves in the composition of the territory neither becoming relativistic nor indeterminate from the outset nor becoming an enclosed system that falls into a false paradigm of sustainability by means of equilibrium. In following the transformations of values along the compositional

relations of the territory of satoyama as it surfaces in *Shape Shifting*, I propose to develop a conception of an inhuman or more-than-human aesthetics. In consequence, such an inhuman aesthetic account opens up a dimension of life beyond human values and thus potentially bears a different kind of politics, an affective politics.

Beyond Harmony

The question of satoyama, the Japanese landscape between village and mountain, but also between sato as human community and yama as nonhuman nature, resides in its hypernaturalization. By this term I mean how a specific landscape undergoes different waves of territorialisation through different forces of which the most significant seem to be attributed to what is defined as human.[5] Human, in the discourse on satoyama, is often considered as the culture-pole on a continuum that is met by nature on its other end.[6] This binary, however, has been criticized in several strands of contemporary cultural theory, such as Science and Technology Studies with Bruno Latour as one of its key proponents[7], feminist posthumanist theory like the works of Donna Haraway or the more recent discourse on speculative realism and new materialism. While most of these strands of theorizing tend to extend the range of actors contributing to the fabric of what constitutes the real, I consider ecological conceptualizations beyond an environmentalist stance, as to be found in the works of Gregory Bateson and Félix Guattari some of the more inclusive and, to use Guattari's term, transversal modes of thinking the more-than-human. The more-than-human takes on a specific role here, not nurturing the schism of a human-nature discourse and the critiques based on the presumption of their primordial difference (a point Bruno Latour attempted to tackle) but an account of existence in its differentiating and resonating modes. The crucial shift I am aiming at consists less in moving from the human as the Archimedean point of action towards a "world" at large that is a realm of the nonhuman conditioning any mode of action, rather I seek for a conception of the more-than-human which includes modes of sensing, feeling, and affecting. As modes of existence they propose different "manners of being" without relying on finite substances.[8] A mode defines a specific capacity for relating, for affecting and being affected, under specific circumstances. The affective realm of existence poses the crucial question towards life of how to take existence not by "what there is" but "how to subsist."[9] Modes of existence are ways of subsisting, ways of creating affections and resonances, develop relays across different strata of existence. These strata, I suggest, are as much of an aesthetic and ethical nature and nature itself being neither a given nor something artificial but a first phase of existence from which the differential unfolding of life takes its course.

Implicitly such an account of the more-than-human as the ethico-aesthetic plane immanent to the composition of a territory includes not only multiple temporalities in its dynamic unfolding but resists a linear history of the human-nature relation. One of the major critiques of the current debates concerning the discourse on the anthropocene revolves around its bold (re)instantiation of a given nature, as resource ready for primitive accumulation, and the rise of industrialization, respectively the fossil fuel and steam paradigm, as its historical markers to be found in the 18th century. The human-nature bond extends into the discourse around satoyama as specific landscape subdued to human treatment increasing biodiversity and its relation to contemporary debates around climate change.[10] Some discussions on satoyama fit it neatly into current narratives of the anthropocene emphasizing its recuperation as specific territory for sustainable forms of landscape conservation and extraction of

alternative energies thus responding to governmental measures addressing climate change.[11] However these linear narratives clash with the dynamic and continuous transformation of the landscape depending on shifting social needs and values as much as transformations on the level of organic and inorganic life. In its very own way of territory-making satoyama undoes the grand narrative of its landscape being an ideal example of the harmony between humans and nature by resisting clearly definable measures of how to live better, more sustainable and environmentally sound. While part of the literature underlines satoyama's heterogeneous historical developments and continuous transformation, its objective remains in the frame of sustainable life where humans are the subjects responsible for its treatment. One of the repeated arguments is the apparent fact that through irrigation systems, paddy fields, and a sustainable use of forestry as energy resources actually increases biodiversity. The increase of biodiversity, for all its positive connotations, limits the potential and scope of satoyama as a diverse territory beyond the human value structure focused on energy management. This is because of a conception of nature as externalized to human action while reiterating their mutual influence and possible consolidation in harmony. In this sense, satoyama as *anthroscape*[12] aligns perfectly with a historical and environmental account of the human-nature binary, which has to be overcome in order to recuperate the possible transformations of value immanent in the composition of territories.

Value in the Age of the Capitalocene and the Common Phase of Nature

Investigating the composition of a territory requires a different take on nature as such. The dynamic relations between different "regimes" including human activities and the "regional natural" mark a decisive step towards another life-continuum based on dynamics and movements between different modes of existence.[13] Despite the accounting for the intrinsic mutual involvement of natural processes and what might be considered human or cultural, these non-modern histories still re-instantiate categorical divides without attending to the relational fabric of the more-than-human as ground from which these domains arise. With the notion of the territory I propose to follow a specific yet open account of the differential dynamics constituting different modes of living and subsisting along the continuum of nature. Rather than seeing the territory as object of the human subject we follow processes of transformation or transvaluation "co-produced by human and extra-human natures."[14] Jason W. Moore's critique opposes the anthropocenic discourse with a much more extensive account of what he calls the Capitalocene. Instead of attributing the dawn of the anthropocene to the 18th century emergence of forms of industrialization, he considers the capitalocene as different regimes of value relation where "capital is value-in-motion is value-in-nature. Value is a bundled relation of human and extra-human natures." He further unfolds his argument: "This perspective [of the co-production of human and extra-human natures] views capitalism as, at once, producer and product of the web of life. The patterns of co-production are contingent but coherent, and this coherence reveals itself in specific patterns of environment-making that reach well beyond conventional reckonings of landscape change."[15]

Two points are crucial in Moore's critique. On the one hand he perceives a general rift between the philosophical recognition of humanity-in-nature and the construction of histories of human relations prior to the web of life. On the other hand his conception of capitalism interlaces different forms of value production within a

general "remaking of land and labor beginning in the 'long' sixteenth century, c. 1450–1640."[16] From here he develops the decisive concern for the underlying development of the notion of territory: Taking the transformations of value relations of early modernity as historical hallmark for the rise of the capitalocene, one might wonder if "industrialization is the most useful concept for explaining large-scale and long-run patterns of wealth, power, and nature in historical capitalism?"[17] The alternative, he suggest, perceives large-scale processes, such as industrialization, moving through nature itself productively shaping a general capitalist worldecology based on the constant transformations of value. In this sense, all aspects of the ecology, meaning all their modes of existence, contribute to the fabrication of value which in turn constitutes as specific territory. The continuous reshaping of value through making territories appear in satoyama's transformations over the centuries and its continuing dynamic evolvement resisting any coherent scheme of conservation. From this point of view, the making of a territory binds forces, contracts them and, in worst case scenarios, attempts to put them on hold — as in "controlling" — while the always already fully operating dynamics deterritorialize the entire system. Capitalism's power of transvaluation underlines its very abstract dynamic of capture and release. Taking transvaluation seriously as a practice means to invent with the making of a territory as world-making-practice resisting redundancy while moving creatively with the general dynamics of a relational field. It means to detach the concept of value from a human scheme of surplus and to activate values immanent in nature constituting specific territories in excess of their harnessing through capital.

In a first step, the concept of nature needs to be included into every domain of existence, marking a decisive phase common to all existence. This differential account of existence enables us to see nature as a first phase of existence in becoming (i.e. individuation), as the relational mesh, which is the ground for a territory to form.[18] Nature, as Gilbert Simondon understands the term, is a "reality of the possible" or a realm of potential, which, in fact, is phaseless and only becomes a first phase when it relates to a process of individuation, that is, the making of a territory. In the midst of a phaseless potential of a common nature the human and extra-human natures compound relationally, activating or experimenting with different modalities of existence. In this attribution of nature as real potential the question of value expands from an economic grid towards a continuous transformation of an ecology rich with affections, capable of making transvaluation a life-practice. As practice transvaluation relies on the activation of different existential elements co-shaping a territory. If capitalism targets value relations, then the question of how to compose existential territories figures crucially as a political mode of activating values escaping capitalist capture (i.e. redundancy). For Moore, capitalism exercises a symbolic reduction externalizing nature. He writes: "Capitalism as project, emerges through a world-praxis that creates external natures as objects to be mapped, quantified, and regulated so that they may service capitals' insatiable demands for cheap nature.[19]

This brings us right to the second step addressing the aesthetic as environment-making practice. For Moore capitalism targets a symbolic transition between land or territory and its appropriation — only what can be drawn out can be seized upon. "The new imperialism of early modernity was impossible without a new way of seeing and ordering reality. One could conquer the globe only if one could see it."[20] Moore describes what I would call a representational regime of ordering the sensible,

attuning its key signs to concrete values and their foreseeable transformations. In resistance to such a representational regime, it is the aesthetic domain of transvaluation that plugs right into the common phase of nature capable of activating new forces of the more-than-human resisting the coupling of capitalist quantification of value and perception. The shift from nature as externalized in representation towards nature as an aesthetic filed of active values of the more-than-human leads us to a reconsideration of a general ethics.

An Ethico-Aesthetic Politics of the Sensible

The relation between value, aesthetics and ethics emphasizes the shift from an analytical take on the ecological as bound to the human-nature-binary towards an ethico-aesthetic politics of activation. Guattari writes, "ethical and aesthetic values do not arise from imperatives and transcendent codes. They call for an existential participation based on an immanence that must be endlessly conquered."[21] How can we engage in processes of transvaluation that take the making of a territory as inclusive process of human and extra-human values to actively generate an existential participation based on immanence? In an anthropocenic discourse satoyama figures as a suitable terrain for engaged, local and sustainable human practices of resourceful environmentalism. While climate change is a matter of fact as much as it is a matter of concern, I would follow Moore's assertion that only on the level of value transformation such "programmed" environmental engagements can surpass their relation to a capitalist value system. In relation to climate change satoyama becomes a perfect example of the meeting of (world) governmental requirements in direct reference to negotiations with large-scale industries. Instead of challenging the entire world-ecology of capitalist value relations immanent to the capital-environmentalism nexus the conservation paradigm of landscape management inhibits more-than-human forces to transform or rather transversalize the notion of value in general. In the words of Guattari, "values have universal significance to the extent that they are supported by the Territories of practice, experience, of intensive power that transversalize them."[22]

Shape Shifting is a filmic expression following these more-than-human forces cocomposing the territory of the film and through it a different engagement with satoyama. The film follows practices, an entire ecology of practices, whose actors are not always clearly identifiable. Action or rather activation takes precedence over the actor. The onlooker feels immersed in a sphere of minor gestures, of series of movements and transformations. Most strikingly, despite the use of "old" technology, such as the 16 mm camera, no feeling of romanticism or of romanticizing occurs. The juxtaposition of different movements, such as a biomass power plant and a river do not oppose these realms, neither is the image targeted on contrast but rather exposes the transvaluative activities constitutive of the territory. We perceive a world of constant mutual inclusion. At the same time, the appropriation of the land for the extraction of resources remains as striking fact of the filmic account of satoyama. The mode of inserting into the dynamic territory of satoyama moves through the gestural qualities of the camera. Generating a visual realm of haptic gestures, of haptic vision, opens a different aesthetic register neither to be found in the environmental writing about satoyama nor its prominent exposure in the animation movie *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988).

If we consider satoyama, as Marhöfer and Lylov suggest, as a membrane between different modes of existence, then the landscape becomes a territory of transvaluation. In the specific aesthetic expression of *Shape Shifting* a new conception of an ethics of value arises beyond a moral foreclosure exercised through a moralist discourse often inscribed in issues of climate change. For Simondon value defines a process of integration, "an unlimited complementarity between the individual and other individuals."[23] Simondon conceives of value as action, as potential capacity to relate. *Shape Shifting* draws our attention to the realm of values that activate another sphere than the relation between humans and nonhumans. The more-than-human defines the in-between zone of formative forces in mutual co-becoming in their very process of mutual activation. If we perceive, as Simondon does, the individual not as entity but a continuous process of individuation, its ethics exercised through value relies on the constant reactivation of potential for becoming. In this differentiating process values become the very capacities of specific relations transforming and shifting in resonance with a multiplicity of other relations. The quality of the film's aesthetic expression is less its juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements generative of the satoyama landscape but rather the way relations and their capacities tune into each other without having to overcode their different ways of subsisting, their manners of being. Beyond a logic of synthesis yielding harmony *Shape Shifting* moves through different tonalities of a territory brimming with affection. It traces populations of relational movements collectively shaping the territory. The mutual immanence of sound and visual images is carried along the specific color tonalities of the 16 mm film material opening up a virtual territory of sensation. Sound and vision are two specific aesthetic forces with their very own ways of forming populations of an affective kind in resonance with a territory. The film practices what Simondon understands as the aesthetic act, that of insertion. Insertion goes beyond a mere subjective will to enter a process. It actively engages capacities for relating and participation in the very becoming of a territory. Ethics as continued process of individuation of a territory always inserts into the more-than-human aesthetic field of potential, its very capacity to relate in becoming. It is here where transvaluation takes on its most crucial role in the making of a territory. A territory that is affective and effects its capacities by exploding any capture in a form — it is the inform of becoming, that is, an affective pull towards existence. Through the very mooring in the relaying of modes of existence, transvaluation becomes a technique to engage with a politics of the sensible beyond form.

The main problem with capitalist forms of valuation resides in the double capture of transcendentalizing values into quantities and their mere organization according to identifiable representations. Territories of transvaluation, on the other hand, account for the specific forces at stake, while refraining from substantializing them along definite attributes. Relation as aesthetic force is abstract in the sense that it enables the crossing of thresholds of different modes of existence and by doing so activating powers of a prior unknown and unfelt kind. The shifting of shapes is far from the circulation of forms. On the contrary, shapes are abstract capacities of territories-on-the-move. The question of satoyama as a territory of transvaluation pushes us to reconsider not only the locus of action but also the very practice of relaying the more-than-human potentials for activation across domains. From here one might venture on and explore how the discourse on climate change and the anthropocene utterly lacks awareness for the
ethico-aesthetic values capable of composing worlds beyond the capitalist value form.

Shape Shifting provides first clues of how aesthetics of the more-than-human opens up an ethics immanent to a politics of the sensible beyond identity and toward specifity.

[1] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 48.

[2] Georges Canguilhem cited in Deleuze, Guattari, *A thousand Plateaus*, 48.

[3] Manuel DeLanda, "Deleuze and the Use of the Genetic Algorithm in Architecture" (2001), accessed at: http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/delanda/pages/algorithm.htm

[4] Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press 1995), 15.

[5] Makoto Yokohari, Jay Bolthouse, "Keep It Alive, Don't Freeze It: a Conceptual Perspective on the Conservation of Continuously Evolving Satoyama Landscapes," *Landscape Ecology* 7 (2011): 207–216, 201.

[6] Tsugihiro Watanabe, "Local Wisdom of Land and Water Management: The Fundamental Anthroscape of Japan," *Sustainable Land Management*, ed. By S. Kapur et al. (Berlin/ Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 351–362.

[7] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[8] Gilles Deleuze: "Cours de Gilles Deleuze: Spinoza–Ontologie –Ethique," *Webdeleuze* (1980), accessed at: http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=23&groupe=Spinoza&langue=2

[9] Gerald Raunig, *DIVIDUUM: Maschinischer Kapitalismus und molekulare Revolution* (Vienna: Transversal Texts, 2014), 248–251.

[10] Tsugihiro Watanabe, "Local Wisdom," 357.

[11] Makoto Yokohari, Jay Bolthouse, "Keep It Alive," 210.

[12] Tsugihiro Watanabe, "Local Wisdom."

[13] Ibid., 361.

[14] Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene: Part I: On the Nature & Origins of Our Ecological Crisis" (2014): 6, accessed at: http://www.jasonwmoore.com/uploads/The_Capitalocene__Part_I__June_2014.pdf

[15] Ibid., 6.

[16] Ibid., 11.

[17] Ibid., 9.

[18] Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation à la limuère des notions de forme et d'information* (Grenoble: Millon, 2005), 305.

[19] Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene," 12.

[20] Ibid., 21.

[21] Félix Guattari, *The Guattari Reader*, ed. By Gary Genosko (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 266.

[22] Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Paul Bains, Julian Pefanis (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 130.

[23] Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation*, 503. Author's translation.