

# THE ROAD THAT TAKES AND POINTS

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The first road takes us away from home. Home is the most intimate place. It is the place of places, a universal archetype, and its basic qualities are the same in different cultures. Road, walking and a trip are archetypes too. There are hearth and household gods in every religion. The road is a mythogenic universal. Two opposite ways of life, settled and nomadic, are connected with the home and road. Immobility and movement are two states of existence, equally substantial and important for man (Tuan 1990, Norberg-Schulz 1971). In environmental aesthetics and in theories of architecture, the town, the settlement, the place and the road are equally recognised as elements of existential space (Stenros 1992; Lynch 1960; Norberg-Schulz 1971, 1985, 1980; Bonsdorff 1998; Karjalainen 1998a, 1998b). A place comes into existence there, where the paths of people, services, goods, experiences, information, thoughts and feelings meet. Meaningfulness and the importance of a place depends on such meetings. One of the most popular symbols of the place is a cross-road, the magical crossroads of fairy-tales. Road takes you to a place and points out a place for you. Roads create and define places.

What forces a man to the road?

The aim, meaning and style of travelling derive from lifestyle, cultural context and environment. A good example of the correlated concatenation is the legendary British lifestyle, English park, English lawn and English picnics. Something that looks very similar on the surface – a trip to the mountains – may possess quite a different meaning. Aleš Erjavec analyses the mountains as a symbol of Slovenian national identity (Erjavec 1994: 211–234). Their trips to the mountains used to be a cultural ritual like the Estonians' Song Festivals. At the same time mountains can be seen as sports equipment and climbing rocks – symbol of a healthy lifestyle. This is popular in Germany and in the United States of America. In Siberia people climb pillar-shaped rocks (*столбы*) to have

a romantic experience of wilderness. Mountains are the symbols of freedom and anarchy.

Apart from the migration of peoples, other, different kinds of collective travelling are known from the history: crusades, war campaigns, missions, pilgrimages and lastly, the contemporary tourism. Nomadism of the twentieth century has its roots and examples in the history. All these movements have been induced by a complex of causes and motifs. Whatever these are, there is one cause that connects them all: travelling away from home provides man with a new experience and an opportunity to see things from multiple angles. This results in a change in the meaning of the word "home." The concept of "home" develops and extends. Being somewhere else, the meanings of things missed change as well. For example, comfort means different, if not opposite, things at home and abroad. In any case, the routine of everyday life is disturbed by a change in the environment, the hierarchy of values either changes or clarifies. Travelling gives the experience of "freedom and inevitability," change and continuity; it brings closer the ambivalent values of private and alien.

Where does the road take us, after all? We use different techniques of travelling: those of the body and of the sight. Maurice Merleau-Ponty connects vision to the movement of body: "My mobile body makes a difference in the visible world, being part of it; that is why I can steer it through the visible. [---] In principle all my changes of place figure in a corner of my landscape; they are recorded on the map of the visible. [---] The visible world and the world of my motor projects are each total parts of the same Being. This extraordinary overlapping, which we never think about sufficiently, forbids us to conceive of vision as an operation of thought that would set up before the mind a picture or a representation of the world, a world of immanence and of ideality. Immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the seer does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens himself to the world." (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 162.)

"The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the "other side" of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself. It is not a self through transparency, like thought, which only thinks its object by assimilating it, by constituting it, by transforming it into thought. It is a self through confusion, narcissism, through inherence of

the one who sees in that which he sees, and through inherence of sensing in the sensed – a self, therefore, that is caught up in things, that has a front and a back, a past and a future. [---] Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrustated into its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body." (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 162–163.)

The continuous dialogue between man and the world; the idea of the world inside me, and of me inside the world is the basis of metaphysical ontology for Merleau-Ponty. Vision is a means of being eased out of oneself, departing from oneself, to be present and participate in the division that takes place in Being. After that I become myself again. Vision is a circulation, a revolving change in the mutual influence of visible and invisible. The idea of leaving home, departing to the road, is in vision and in meeting with the Being at the crossroads, thus experiencing that one belongs to the world. The result is an extension of the private world, the assembling and absorbing of a number of things in one's personality. This means an improvement of self-realisation and the styling of one's way of existence in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1963: 120, 173–175; 1968: 176–193).

We move around, wander around, drive around or look around. We take our trip and finally return to where we started. Road from home has two directions. We leave to come back. The final point of each journey is, again, home, if not in the direct physical sense, then at least in the mental or symbolic sense. The mythical heroes Gilgames, Inanna, Orpheus, Ulysses, Aeneas (also the Estonian hero Kalevipoeg and the shamans) return to the universe carrying a message after visiting Heaven or Hades. The motif of the "prodigal son" is repeated in the archaic myths, religions and arts in the East and in the West. Way back home is the last stage of a journey. Departure and arrival happen in the same place. Journey to the home is a circle.

The metaphorical road is used in mytho-poetic texts in relation with meeting one's fate or a trial, or overcoming difficulties or attaining wisdom. It is mostly characterized by its linear quality. The direction and the course of a road are connected with the concept of time. Movement along a road is temporal. Our traditional time concept is linear, of the Judaic-Christian origin. The idea of a linear road is a part of it. Circle and line are the images belonging to space-

time. Even death, the end of one's path through life, is the beginning of a new life beyond. The idea of redemption is in concordance with the idea of a linear earthly path through life, a delimited segment of time in the eternity. The dualisms of final and infinite, mortal and immortal do not exclude, but rather presuppose a belief in the return to prehistoric purity, to the time before the original sin, meaning the beginning and eternal life in the garden of Eden. The ideas of man having been made of the dust of the ground; resurrection of the mortal body; man's burial into the ground and other rituals are connected with the circle. Mytho-poetic images of the line and the circle do not belong to the Euclidean geometry. Neither have the notions of wandering and looking around anything to do with geometry. They are irregular movements that depend on the whole set of complicated relations between the body and topography, memory and imagination, perception, knowledge and environment; they do not depend on mathematical relations.

The direction and level of movement can change, but it always returns to itself, to the beginning. The prehistoric spatialised time moves and develops in circles, it is an eternal return (Eliade 1998). Home is not the only holy place that makes us move in circles. Holy places within the sacral and profane space have the same effect. Symbolic return to the beginning guarantees regeneration.

Circular movement is a recurring subject in the history of thought from the prehistoric myths to the philosophy of the 20th century. Here the metaphor of a spiral is used. The pervading absolute Idea evolves in spiral to arrive again to itself. In Martin Heidegger's early theory of cognition the central motif is a "train of thought." The thoughts move around. Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty express the necessity of returning to the beginning of thinking, of starting a new circle of cognition. Heidegger's *Holzweg*, written in 1949, and all of his post-war work is, in a way, a philosophy of return. Road as a place is closed, it is a world of its own, a circle of departure and return (Heidegger 1980). Road crosses a creative landscape.

Leaving home is never a final act. There is no absolute homelessness. For this reason the motif of homelessness and the poetic of homesickness are repeatedly found in literature, music and art. Homesickness is sublime, involving suffering, and the necessity to contrive this adds charm and meaning to travelling. A need to experience homesickness may turn into psychological dependence. A homesick traveller is mentally like a snail, who carries its shell. Yi-Fu Tuan has

analysed the letters and diaries of Nansen, Bird and other travellers in the polar regions and deserts (Tuan 1995). He has concluded that the act of leaving home, especially to an extreme environment like the desert or ice fields, confirms the value of home. Travellers always think of their homes. Mentally they have taken their homes with them.

In the phenomenological approach space is embodied in place. According to Merleau-Ponty man is the zero point of an environment, a part of the flesh of the world (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 178). Using or arranging space and creating a place for oneself, man's activity is in essence classified as that of embodying something. Physically man's private space is an extension of his body, mentally – the embodiment of the mode and style of his being. Things, places and roads are the embodiments of man's activities. A road embodies the style of man's movements, either the movement of body, feeling or thought. Embodiment has its own style, re-embodiment means a change in the style of being. Home is the closest space of the body, the most intensely embodied space. Visuality is not dominating at home, all senses are important there (Tuan 1990). Leaving home means a re-embodiment from settled life to a mobile, wandering style. Circle as symbolic image involves the meaning of man's inseparability from his home.

Circle is a widely used latent metaphor, referring at the same time to a cognitive unit in scientific literature. Ivar Paulson writes about the circle of home, the résumé of his book is titled "From Circle to Circle" (Paulson 1997). Tuan characterises the relation between home space and a strange space through concentric circles (Tuan 1995: 139). In discussing historical towns, the model of concentric circles is axiomatic. We read in *The Estonian Architecture*, that Tallinn, like the majority of medieval towns, developed concentrically (Raam 1993: 10–16). In the 13th century the centre of the town was surrounded by a girdle of churches and monasteries. In the 1960s the circular and radial roads were reconstructed (*ibid.*: 14).

In literature on the history of settlement the oldest known ideogram denoting town is often mentioned, it is an Egyptian hieroglyph consisting of a cross and a circle around it (Jones 1966: 7–8; Norberg-Schulz 1971: 29). This symbol indicates at the origin and function of towns, which were located on crossroads, protected by a circular wall, rampart, moat and road. The cross symbolises a meeting-point, the circle – the compactness of a connected community as well as its border with strange areas, the physical, moral and mental barriers. Both the

cross and the circle denote places in cartography. Graphically the cross in a circle develops into a grid, resembling a spider's net on the maps, referring to exact places and roads in the landscape. Circular roads and crossroads have created the town as a meeting-place. The network of streets is connected with the network of roads, the latter connect towns with other places. The network is not only a cartographic symbol, it is a topographical scheme and iconic sign, denoting (representing) movement on real landscape. The network is a symbol that represents different natural and artificial roads. Hydrological terms are: hydrographic network, subsoil and ground water monitoring network, network of water reserves, etc. The natural network of waters in a raised bog consists of low bog hollows, bog pools, springs, lakes and brooks – consequently, of places and paths of circulating waters. They all have physical equivalents in the nature.

In mathematics the net method, net analysis, net graph and grid are used. Abraham Moles: "... the classical cognitive method in the humanities reminds of a net, where one moves from a knot to another and, as a result of this, forms a "screen of knowledge" with texture that resembles of a fabric. The latter becomes more dense in study" (Moles 1973: 45). Density of the net corresponds with the amount of knowledge. The nets of information, communication, virtual and internet mark invisible connections. "The net" denotes conceptual schemes. The experience of using a net is very old and derives not only from the movement of a traveller. Ancient hunters, warriors and fishermen netted booty or haul. A spider has often been mentioned as being the model of net-using for man. According to Democritus and Empedocles man as a weaver is the student of spider. According to the Vedic scriptures and ancient Hindu mythology the cosmic threads (or winds) bolster the universe like breathing animates a human body. Thread of the threads is Brahman or Atman or God. The Earth is bound to Sun by threads. In Rig-Veda two sisters, the Night and the Dawn, are incessantly weaving the Sun. The Sun itself is a cosmic spinner and weaver. In Upanishads it is compared with a spider for hundreds of times. In Bhagavadgita Krishna weaves the world (Eliade 1998: 249–299). The cosmic spider is identified either with the Sun, the extra-personal principle (Atman-Brahman) or with the God. Weaving symbolizes cosmogonic act. "Spider's net supremely illustrated the possibility of "unification" of the space beginning from the center, where the four main points meet" (Eliade 1998: 299).

The idea that all living, existing and real (in as well as outside the time) has

been created, forms the basis of archaic Hindu thinking. Connection and integration are necessary for real being. What has been created, remains connected with the Creator. The World and its inhabitants are not free. Living means being connected and dependant either on the God, the Principle, the world or other beings (Eliade 1998: 309, 312). In the VII song of Homer's *Iliad* Zeus has a golden rope. In his *Laws* Plato compares man with a marionette made and manipulated by the gods. The sacred golden thread should be preferable to other threads. Plato's bright thread holds the world together (Eliade 1998: 308). Image of the net (thread, rope, chain, string) is ambivalent. The net connects and ties as well. This can mean either a privileged status, being one of the elect (immediately connected with the Creator) as well as the lack of freedom. Spider's web can be a road and simultaneously a net for communicating information.

In all these aspects the net (as image, notion, metaphor) guarantees free movement along the roads on earth and on waters; also on the internet and in the cosmic spider's web. On the other hand, the direction and limits of movement are predescribed by the conditions of the net. High density makes the net stronger, but its permeability decreases. Even an undersized fish can be caught in such net. Paraphrasing Karl Popper, a dense net of empiricists' categories levels the haul and reveals all the fish to be of the same size. The larger the "ecological footprints" are, and the denser their paths, the less chance is left for self-regulation in the global environment. Man's relations with the nature, society and other men are subjected to the dialectics of freedom and inevitability, hence the ambivalence of nets.

Since the earth is covered with artificial network of information, energy etc., that continuously and vigorously shape the man's world, can we say that he is caught in a net?<sup>1</sup> Has the dream of "other nature" (Marx), noo-sphere (Teilhard de Chardin) or man as an incarnated spirit and a part of the flesh and bone of the earth become true? Is being "caught in the net" going to bring mankind any luck?

The spider is happy, the fly is not. A strong and flexible network enables to move in each direction, starting from the centre. From here it is possible to rule over information on everything happening in the net. A spider rules the area over which it has woven its net. The idea is to bind the prey, deprive it of free-

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<sup>1</sup> The metaphor of "catching in a net" has similar meanings in the languages of several nations that live by the sea. In English: *cast the net, spread the net, pull the strings, in mesh* etc.; in German: *im Netze fangen, verstricken* etc.)

dom and get it entangled, since it is not able to find its way among the net of sticky threads, as it is poisoned and totally confused.

The ambivalent network embodies a society: the denser and wider the net, the easier it is to manipulate the victim. The net embodies power that can even catch the spirit in its net and increase injustice.

In conclusion I would like to quote Anto Raukas in *Estonia. Nature* on spider's net: "The last picture of this volume does not symbolize Kalevipoeg's (Estonian national hero – *K.L.*) journey to the end of the world or the hopeless combat of intellectuals with bureaucracy. I would rather give glory to the nature. Each of us has probably been admiring the perfect structural geometry of a spider, weaving its net, as well as its tenacity in starting anew, when a reckless human hand has destroyed its work. Spiders' weaving technique has developed towards perfection during four hundred millions of years. But, like the spider itself, its nets have not changed in these millions of years. Compared to spider's evolution, the development of *Homo sapiens*, the "clever man" (of whose existence we only know from the beginning of the last Ice Age), and even that of the ape-man *Homo erectus* two millions years ago, seem quite insignificant. But unlike spider, man has managed to cause irretrievable damage to the nature during his comparatively short existence. This damage can be seen in the Estonian countryside as well. Let the spider's web between branches of a tree remind us of an everlasting that can turn out to be an illusion." (Raukas 1995: 606.)

## Conclusion

Place and road, as well as cross, circle, line and net denoting them, are visually and verbally highly ambiguous and universally spread. According to Gaston Bachelard "inversion of an image shows its importance, affirms its perfection and self-evidence" (Bachelard 1998: 124).

The metaphors of cross, circle and net are used so widely and in so many different connections that they definitely affirm this. They respond to man's deepest experience of being in the world. They are the important means of expressing his belonging to this carnal world.

Cross, circle and net belong to the road. A road embodies linear movement. Normally the road is never a straight line. In its physical shape and especially as an intentional object, as an image or metaphor, linearity of the road is quite



complicated. It is a line with knots, crossings, returns, hooks, sideways, circles, repeats etc. It is a course along the road of experienced and remembered tales: "A straight line conveys no information beyond the fact that the line is there, like a continuous dial tone of the telephone, a single monotonous tone on the radio, or the straight line on an oscilloscope when it is not monitoring any changes ... Only the curved, crossed, or knotted line can be a sign making the line simultaneously something intelligible, conveying meaning, standing for something else, and at the same time being repeatable...." (Hillis Miller 1992: 8.)

The possibility of returning and repeating has an ethical value: it includes consolation, an opportunity to improve one's mind and to redeem. For this reason, line together with cross and circle form a cluster of archetypes having a human content. All these visual and verbal images, imaginations and concepts are in constant dynamic movement. But their lasting core guarantees connections in time, cultural continuity and the recurrence of human experience in new images and new contexts.

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