

In the current period beginning some ten to twelve thousand years ago, a significant leap in the cultural evolution of humankind occurred. The Neolithic revolution brought us both agriculture and cities. Jane Jacobs, famously, argued that the rise of cities may well have been what necessitated agriculture, which was directly counter to the orthodoxy of the time. The received view was that agriculture made settlement necessary, which then enabled cities and their energised crowding of people to come into being. Scholars now, however, are largely of the opinion that seeking to establish primacy, as is so often the case, is a futile goal<sup>1</sup>. Agriculture and urbanism simply enabled each other, and ever since then humans, cities and the countryside have evolved together. This view also dispatches the old rural/urban dichotomy rather handily. Country mice and city mice are still all just mice, it seems.

A view of human history and geography so sweeping allows us to consider all landscape occupied by humans as our habitat; and we are a very widely distributed species. From the igloo to the little grass shack, vernacular building is everywhere uniquely adapted to local conditions, and the designed landscape and city has long been shaped by them too. So indeed are our ways of life and our daily rounds called, aptly, by the sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, our *habitus*. The term also includes notions of class and lifestyle; the circles we move in both physically and socially. It is remarkable how well the human habitat has, throughout history, served the human animal in all these regards.

In 1974 Yi-Fu Tuan built a powerful sense of cultural identity and the love of place as *topophilia* which has helped to inform our contemporary understanding of landscape as a dialogue between people and their environment. A decade later E.O. Wilson termed our affinity for other living things *biophilia*, and argued that this innate sense of interconnection is an aid to both our own evolution and that of many other species with whom we share the planet. These ideas amongst others on parallel tracks, have allowed us to open out our understanding of civilisation as a construction not just of the interdependence of humans in civil society in urban settings, but encompassing all life and all things. It can be surmised, in this case, that progress and improvement are inevitable.

A key problem that plagues us, however, is that of the "shifting baseline syndrome," which militates against progress. This posits that each generation seeks to return to a golden age that is within memory. Thus the 'golden' age becomes ever more brassy with each generation. My generation, for example, now romanticises post-industrial landscapes. Humans now have incredible power to shape the face of the planet, our habitat, but it is possible that our vision of sustainability is progressively eroded. Perhaps this is just a new way of seeing the perennial balance between progress and entropy.

The place of the landscape professions now and in the future must be one in which we reinforce a positive and progressively more flourishing vision for our human habitat: one which strengthens our bonds to place, which brings city and country together in balance, and which benefits all species to the benefit of our own. The need for us to be an activist profession will only grow with each generation.

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1 For example, did the French or the English invent tinned food? The answer is that human cultural evolution and the availability of technology and knowledge made the invention of tinned food possible at the same time in both England and France.