Liminality, Seasonality and Landscape
Kenneth R Olwig
a SLU-Alnarp, Department of Landscape Planning, Alnarp, Sweden

Available online: 23 Jan 2007

To cite this article: Kenneth R Olwig (2005): Liminality, Seasonality and Landscape, Landscape Research, 30:2, 259-271
To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01426390500044473

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions
This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Liminality, Seasonality and Landscape

KENNETH R. OLWIG
SLU-Alnarp, Department of Landscape Planning, Alnarp, Sweden

ABSTRACT  To the student of landscape, as well as to the landscape planner, designer and manager, it is important to distinguish between differing modalities in the conceptualization of landscape and seasonality. The logic of the absolute geometric space of the map and central point perspective prospect, and the chronometric time of the calendar, is qualitatively different from the liminality of place and seasonal holidays. Here it is the content that defines the seasons, not the regularities of a quantitative system of measurement. This distinction is critical when it comes to working with seasonal landscapes, because they can be defined in terms of either modality.

KEY WORDS: Season, landscape, liminal, space, place and time, Nordic perspectives

Seasons in Space and Time

Seasonal landscape phenomena occur in space and time, but they are also a measure of space and time. Spring can thus be said to occur between equinox on 21 March and summer solstice on 22 June in the space on the earth covered by the northern hemisphere. This is the definition of spring given in a standard American dictionary (Merriam-Webster, 1968, 'spring'). It is also possible to argue that the flow of the seasons measures time through the processes of terrestrial growth, as when a standard Danish dictionary defines spring as the time when leaves spring forth (Politiken, 2002, 'forår', transl. K. R. Olwig). The word season derives from a Latin word meaning to sow, and “to every thing”, in the words of Ecclesiastes, “there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted” (Holy Bible, 1952 (orig. 1611), p. 855, Ecclesiastes, chapter 3:1 – 2; Merriam-Webster, 1968, ‘season’). In this case spring, and time itself with it, is measured by its content, e.g. the time to sow, not by the chronometer. Some of the earliest classic landscape paintings, such as those from the 16th century by Pieter Breughel, were not made to be studied individually, but serially, as an expression of the content of the unfolding seasons as captured in a series of works. This suggests that time and seasonality have long been fundamental to the understanding of landscape, and that a more in-depth study is required. This essay explores some of the bases for such a study. It will be argued here that if landscape planning and design are to take cognizance of the role of seasonality, it is necessary to consider differing modalities of thought concerning...
the relationship between seasonality and landscape, time and space, history and place.

Liminality and Seasonality

Seasons can be defined as occurring in time, as when the spring begins at the vernal equinox, but seasons can also provide a measure for defining time, as when the sprouting of trees indicates the coming of spring. The two, of course, are interrelated, as in the definition of spring given in a Swedish dictionary: “The season that follows after winter and is characterized by the return of the light and nature’s beginning to liven up” (Norstedt, 1999, ‘vårr’, transl. K. R. Olwig). It is a fact that the vernal equinox marks an important point in the cyclical relationship between the sun and earth, which ultimately has much to do with such terrestrial phenomena as the springing forth of leaves. To the farmer, however, it is not particularly helpful to calculate the spring growing season as beginning on 21 March. To the farmer, natural phenomena such as the sprouting of leaves are more realistic indicators of spring because seasonal transition involves a highly irregular, complex process of interrelated climatic, geologic, floral, faunal and social change, and the ability to read all the signs of this change correctly can spell agricultural success or failure.

The linear time of the chronometer is divisible into ever-smaller regularly divided scales, down to that of the nanosecond, and beyond. There is no such regularity, however, in the manifold changes that the farmer must gauge before planting. The seasons gradually merge into one another, and only when a number of variables spell success is it a good idea to plant. The second when the vernal equinox begins is a precise measure, which becomes even more precise when it is further divided into nanoseconds. The point in time, like the point in Euclidian space, is infinitely small in principle. So small, as the ancient Greeks well understood, that the point is in principle an idea, which has no substance. In a system of infinitely reducible linear scales there is no break in time that can mark the threshold between qualitatively different time periods. The etymologically primary definition of space, however, is a “lapse of time between two points in time”, as in the expression “a space of time” (Merriam-Webster, 1968, ‘space’). This suggests that there may be, under certain circumstances, a fundamental identity between our experience of space and time—as in the statement: “the contemplative space after breakfast and before work” (Merriam-Webster, 1968, ‘space’). The etymologically primary definition of space as a spell of time suggests a primordial mode of thinking about space and time that is less concerned with linear temporal movement forward, than with the pause between. It thus differs from the absolute time marked on a chronometer and utilized in the study of physics, in which ‘space-time’ means: “the four-dimensional order within which every physical existent may be determined by specifying its three spatial coordinates and one temporal coordinate” (Merriam-Webster, 1968, ‘space–time’). Centuries-old terms like space of time and while (which means ‘a period of time’ or ‘a portion of time considered with respect to its duration’) suggest the long-standing existence of qualitatively different ways of thinking about time that depart from the metric regularity of the chronometer (Merriam-Webster, 1968, ‘while’; Oxford English
Dictionary (OED), 1971, ‘while’). If, however, seasons are thought of as being constituted by their content, e.g. the springing forth of leaves and the livening up of nature, then we are dealing with phenomena that mark a threshold between qualitatively different periods of time.

‘Limen’ is Latin for threshold. A threshold originally was the section of a tree limb, a stone, or the like, that lies under a door to a house, but it has subsequently gained the more general meaning of a boundary, such as that between the inside and outside of the house. It is thus a boundary between qualitatively different phenomena. The area of the home place is qualitatively different from the space that surrounds it. The carrying of the bride across the threshold thereby marks a major transition in the lives of the carrier and the carried, and in the status of the building into which they enter—which goes from being a house to being a home. The limen of the Roman Empire, that formed the boundary to Germania, thus marked more than a boundary between two neutral geometric spaces, it marked the boundary between civilization and barbarism. The boundary between winter and spring might thus be better understood as a limen or threshold between two qualitatively different seasons, than as a point in time, beginning at 12:00.01 midnight on 21 March.

**Liminality and the Seasons of Life**

The seasons gradually merge into each other, just as childhood gradually merges into adulthood. In this respect, 21 March, or age 21, is an arbitrary point in chronometric time. Yet there is a qualitative threshold between winter and spring, childhood and adulthood, which can be psychologically, socially and practically useful to limn as a space in time. This qualitative bounding of quantitatively unbounded phenomena, such as the seasons of the year, or of life, has historically been accomplished through liminal rites of passage. The cyclical change of seasons was thus marked by holidays/holy days—literally ‘whole’ days, the name suggesting a kind of pause or break in the normal flow of time.

One such holiday is Yule (spelled Jul in the modern Scandinavian languages), a name that may well have originated through the mixing of ancient Germanic words for wheel and year to create a word signalling the cycle of the year (Politiken, 2002, ‘jul’), much as the word Yuletide calls to mind the ebb and flow of time marked by the tides. The Scandinavian word for time is ‘tid’ and that for year is ‘år’ (modern spelling). In Old Norse, according to the Danish anthropologist, Kirsten Hastrup: “Tid (cf. English ‘tide’) had connotations of rising flood and of weather. The word ‘år’ for year also meant ‘harvest’ and ‘abundance’. Thus both ‘tid’ and ‘år’ reflect notions of periodicity and are defined by content rather than by borders” (Hastrup, 1985, p. 67). The English word ‘tide’ once meant time, or, more specifically, “a space of time (as between two high tides or during the height of a flood tide) at sea when the water level permits a particular activity to be carried out” (Merriam-Webster, 1968, ‘tide’). ‘Tide’ is still used for time in connection with Yule, and other holidays, and denotes a space of time that lasts for such a long ‘while’ that it is termed a holiday ‘season’.

Yule and midsummer were not just dates in the calendar, marking the winter and the summer solstice. They were also the liminal poles that divided the ancient
northern European year into two primary seasons that still lurk in the Danish words for spring, ‘forår’, and fall, ‘efterår’, meaning before and after ‘year’, year here referring to summer (Politiken, 2002, ‘år’). The ancient Germanic word ‘ár’, forerunner of the modern Danish ‘år’ and etymologically related to the English ‘year’, initially referred to abundance and harvest (Gurevich, 1985, p. 95; OED, 1971, ‘year’). The importance of the cyclical process of organic growth to our conception of the seasons is underlined both by the identification of ‘år’ with summer and the fact that, as noted, the word ‘season’ itself derives from a Latin word meaning to sow (Merriam-Webster, 1968, ‘season’). Even today, the holidays marking these seasonal changes remain major liminal rituals. Yule, of course, has morphed into Christmas, but the lighted evergreen and the Yule log remain to remind us of pre-Christian origins. Midsummer, the polar opposite of Yule, has similarly morphed into Saint John’s Eve, a holiday that nearly rivals Christmas in Sweden. Christmas marks the birth of the Christ child, thereby linking seasonal passage to a threshold in the life of a person. Other personal rites of passage, now Christianized, such as confirmation, likewise tend to have a seasonal link, in this case to spring. Such rites often create, or reinforce, a sense of community belonging, whether it is to the community of the Church (celebrated in the rite of communion at Christmas), or to the community of adults.

**Landscape and Spatial Liminality**

Pilgrimage is the classic form of spatial liminality as described by the anthropologist Victor Turner (1969, 1974). A pilgrimage typically involves a pattern of movement in which, for example, the citizens of a city travel to a holy place in the country, usually by some form of simple transport, such as walking. In so doing they cross an invisible *limen* in space that separates the city with its hierarchically structured daily life from the holy place where the pilgrims experience an egalitarian sense of community and place identity, which Turner calls ‘communitas’. The sense of community is emphasized by the simplicity of travel, that all can afford, and the simplicity of dress. If the pilgrimage is associated with a particular holy day, then a threshold in both time and space is crossed simultaneously.

Turner notes that pilgrimage often has a subtle political dimension. The holy place in the country might thus be, as in Mexico, the place of an ancient Native American civilization, as well as a site identified with a Christian saint. A European example would be the Montserrat Mountains of Catalonia, where a statue of a Black Virgin Mary was found (Figure 1).

This place, whose caves long provided the habitat of hermit monks, was of enormous importance during the era of the Franco regime’s oppression of Catalanian culture. Here was the holy place where the Catalanian written language was preserved in ancient manuscripts. Pilgrimage to the Montserrat Mountains was, therefore, often more than a religious pilgrimage to create and reinforce religious community: a pilgrimage to create and reinforce Catalanian cultural and political community. Pilgrimage from the urban places, such as Barcelona, where most Catalanians live, to Montserrat, was thus not simply a trip to the country; it was a means of creating the sense of belonging to a country.
If we return to Breughel’s series of seasonal landscape paintings, we see that they are filled with expressions of both temporal and spatial liminality. In *Haymaking*, for example, seasonal change is marked, among other things, by the holiday-making activities of the villagers around a maypole on the village commons, or green (Figure 2). This activity coincides with the hay harvest as a means of marking seasonal change. There is also, however, a road passing through the landscape that is marked by a shrine to a saint, suggesting a route of pilgrimage involving movement in space from place to place in a landscape image in which highways and waterways link together city and village, peasant farm and castle, in what appears to be a socio-political unity (Figure 3).

Breughel’s paintings remind us that the same divisions that apply to the movement of time also apply to space. The ruled lines that divide the globe with lines of longitude and latitude, as Euclid made clear, are so infinitely thin, that they necessarily must belong to the realm of ideas rather than the phenomenal world. The gradients of scale that divide a ruler are as infinitely divisible as those that divide the chronometer, which means that, ultimately, the space between these lines is so infinitely small that it ceases to exist, except as an idea. These linear gradients divide an undifferentiated space in which there is no qualitative difference between the space in front of or behind the gradient. But just as this notion of unbroken, undifferentiated time creates the necessity for the conception of a liminal ‘space of time’ in which things can happen (the pause defined by content rather than by borders), so too the notion of an unbroken space creates the necessity of a liminal concept of spatiality that allows time for things to take place. As the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan puts it:

![Image](image_url)
Figure 2. This detail from Pieter Breughel’s painting *Haymaking*, from the mid 1500s, shows the villagers engaged in sport around the maypole on the village commons.

Figure 3. Breughel’s painting *Haymaking* is part of a series of landscapes expressing the seasons as they manifest themselves in the life of a countryside district in the lowlands of Europe.
What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value... Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location [in undifferentiated Euclidean space] to be transformed into place. (Tuan, 1977, p. 6)

A liminal temporal pause in space creates place and since “the facts of landscape”, as Carl Sauer once wrote, “are place facts”, landscape too must be the product of such a liminal break with the geometric logic of Euclidean space (Sauer, 1925, p. 26).

**The Historical Link between Liminality and Landscape**

The role of seasonality and liminality in Breughel’s paintings becomes clearer if seen in the context of the historical meaning of landscape in Northern Europe. I will here focus on Scandinavia, where the Icelandic Sagas and other early mediaeval sources, coupled with archaeological evidence, help elucidate the importance of seasonality and liminality in constituting landscape.

In mediaeval Scandinavia, and no doubt much further back in time, the representatives of those who dwelled in different places within a given area made a regular pilgrimage-like movement to gather at holy places where a court with judicial and legislative powers, called a *thing*, met to establish what is known as ‘landscape’ law. The word ‘thing’ derives from a common Germanic root meaning something like “the right space of time to gather in order to discuss things” (the object for discussion) (Politiken, 2002, ‘ting’). It was through the formalization of local customary law that took place at the *thing*, that the legal community of a land or country, such as Jutland or Iceland, was ‘built’ as a landscape of dwelling. The word ‘built’ here relates less to the hammer and nails with which houses are constructed, and more to the process of dwelling by which an *abode*, or *bower*, is created as a place of being: a home within a legal community. It was by *abiding* by the law in one’s place of dwelling that one became defined as a legal being, within a legal community or *res publica* (a Latin word in which ‘res’ means ‘thing’). The word ‘dwell’ is akin to the Old Norse ‘dvæla’ meaning to delay, or ‘tarry’, bringing to mind Tuan’s notion that ‘place is pause’ (Merriam-Webster, 1968, ‘dwell’; Politiken, 2002, ‘dvæle’).

Each village would have had a local ‘thing’, held in the open on the village green, where villagers paused and gathered to deliberate on matters of common interest, and thereby generated a sense of being a community in place, rooted in the seasonal tasks of daily life. But each such place would also be represented at the seasonal gathering of the land’s thing, where the encompassing landscape law was generated and a larger sense of being a community with place identity. A landscape was thus both a place and a gathering of subsidiary places—gathered symbolically at the thing. To be or not to be, literally, was to dwell, or not to dwell, because your legal place within the community determined whether you were under the protection of the law and peace of the land, or whether you were an outlaw, prey to anyone who wished to rob or kill you. More modern meanings of thing and being grew out of this earlier notion of being as dwelling (Merriam-Webster, 1968, ‘be’).
The village thing was held out of doors on the village green or commons, and it remained a special place, set off as an area that belonged to everyone and to no-one, that could also be used as the site for liminal, seasonal, holiday sports and rituals, such as the construction of a maypole; these places are often preserved as such into the present in many parts of Western Europe and New England, in the United States. At a place like the Icelandic Thingvellir (thing valley), where the All Thing (i.e. for the whole of Iceland) was held out of doors, the liminality of a ‘thing’ was underlined by its character as a valley bordered by steep rocky cliffs that was entered via a clearly demarcated threshold (Olwig, 1998). Beyond this threshold the ‘peace’ of law was sanctified, and it was a grave transgression to use weapons in this place. It was thus within this demarcated area that things could take place. The Icelandic All Thing gatherings were of a seasonal nature and involved a pilgrimage-like movement over great distances from all over Iceland.

The thing meeting was more than a political meeting; it also had religious, cultural and economic dimensions. Thing meetings, at both the village and the ‘land’ level, were thus often held at places identified as being holy, by the presence of, for example, ancient grave mounds (which often still bear the name ‘thing mound’). But a holy day at the thing could also be a holiday, marked by sports, music, dance and song and the holding of a market. Long after the ancient mediaeval thing lost its autonomy in the Renaissance, and was reduced to the status of a regional court under the state, the associated market and entertainment tradition remained. In some subliminal way, as Turner suggests, ancient liminal practices also persist, for example, in the popularity of such activities as hiking, which are also often practised by a group (e.g. Scouts), and which similarly work to create group identity. The popularity of hiking ancient trails is exemplified by the continued use of the ‘Oxen road’ that leads to the site of the Jutland ‘Snapsting’ at Viborg. Hiking in the country, it can be argued, is a means of generating a collective and individual identity as belonging to the community of a country (Darby, 2000). Activities such as hiking, or pilgrimage, due to the character of the mode of transportation (footsteps), put one in contact not only with the geographical terrain, but also with the season. The well-seasoned hiker or pilgrim knows the landscape both as an individual, and as part of a community and, as such, knows it not just as a terrain, but as a landscape that is constantly undergoing a process of transformation through time, and through the process by which it is traversed, and used.

To comprehend the role of seasonality and liminality in our present-day understanding of landscape, it is useful to take an historical perspective. Breughel’s paintings continue to appeal to contemporary landscape sensibilities as quintessential expressions of landscape, but it is difficult to understand why this is so, since they are centuries old, until the paintings are seen in context. Then it becomes clear that even if society has changed vastly since Breughel’s time, we still experience a need to mark the seasonal thresholds of the year, and of life, and we still find a need to mark the thresholds of the landscapes of places where we dwell. To further the comprehension of contemporary notions of landscape and seasonality it is useful to contextualize the above historical analysis in relation to contemporary understandings of landscape.
From Space to Place, and from Place to Space

In the United States, especially to the west of the Mississippi, in the area constituted by the so-called Louisiana Purchase made by Thomas Jefferson two centuries ago, territories and locations were largely demarcated according to the lines of longitude and latitude, prior to White settlement. The White settlers therefore made their homes in locations demarcated on the undifferentiated space of the map. What began as undifferentiated space, to paraphrase Tuan, became place as the settlers got to know it better and endowed it with value. After moving across the wide-open spaces of the West, they paused to settle and dwell, thereby making “it possible for location [in undifferentiated Euclidean space] to be transformed into place” (Tuan, 1977, p. 6). The opposite process, however, can also take place. This was the case of the place and landscape identities of the Native American population, who had long dwelled in the areas settled by the Whites. By the strokes of the pen, Thomas Jefferson and his cartographers reduced Native American places to locations on the map of the United States of America (Cosgrove, 1984; Olwig, 2002b).

The time zones are demarcated according to the lines of longitude, which are calculated according to the movement and position of celestial bodies. Hence they function as a demarcation of both space and time—and hence the measurement of lines of longitude in terms of hours and minutes. Spring thus begins both at a certain time, 12:01 midnight on the morning of 21 March, and at a given place marked by the line of longitude demarcating a given time zone. The United States is a vast nation with a relatively short history, in which it is practical to find a common national denominator for the beginning of spring. Huge blocks of territory, roughly equivalent to one-third of the United States, enter spring at the same nanosecond. In just three hours, all of the United States time zones have entered spring. Denmark, by contrast, is a small nation whose roots extend back into pre-history, and whose irregular territorial boundaries reflect the vagaries of that history, rather than the lines of latitude and longitude. Here, according to a comparable Danish dictionary, as noted earlier, spring does not begin on 21 March, but “when the weather becomes milder and leaves sprout on the trees” (Politiken, 2002, ‘forår’, transl. K. R. Olwig).

Just as spring can be thought of as beginning at a given movement in chronographic time within a given geometrically defined space, as in the United States, it is possible to represent landscape using similar geometric methods. Representations of landscape in painting can be based on cartographic methods in which the graticule used by the artist is equivalent to the lines of longitude and latitude used by the cartographer (Cosgrove, 1988; Edgerton, 1975). Here the scenic elements of the landscape are fitted to the undifferentiated space of geometry and single-point perspective. Historically, this was the way White Americans developed a sense of place identity to locations in the Western United States. Landscape painters followed in the footsteps of the early cartographers, essentially applying cartographic methods to the visualization of the ‘natural’ scenery being mapped (Cosgrove, 1984; Daniels, 1993). American tourists followed thereafter in the footsteps of the artists, and through this process the picturesque scenery found in various locations became transformed into places of national significance, many of which became designated as national parks (Lowenthal, 2003). This process of place making is quite different from that described in the paintings of the Renaissance.
Lowlands of Europe, where the subject is a pre-existing centuries-old political landscape (however idealized), and central-point perspective was often not used (Olwig, 2002b, pp. 3 – 42). This difference in conceptualizing the space, place, time and seasonality of landscape has implications for contemporary landscape research, management, design and planning.

Seasonality in Contemporary Landscape

To the resident of Los Angeles, winter is not particularly identifiable with a given landscape phenomenon, such as snow, but the Los Angelino will know from the dictionary that it begins on 22 December, the winter solstice. When I lived in the Los Angeles area as a fellow at the University of California’s Humanities Research Institute, I remember watching a news report of a snowstorm in New York together with the institute secretary, a native of Los Angeles. The scene of people struggling to shovel out their cars so that they could get to work prompted her to comment upon how strange it seemed to her that people actually lived and worked in winter landscapes. For her winter was something that one experienced on a ski trip to the picture-postcard landscape of a mountain ski resort. Winter, in this sense, is a season that is defined not so much by changing landscape phenomena, as by the regular movement of the chronometer and calendar, or through movement in space. The time of winter and the landscape scenery of winter are two different things. When seen this way, there is always some location where the ski enthusiast, for example, can find winter, or the surfer can find summer. To such people the seasons are largely a measure of chronometric time or geometric space. From this perspective, the planning, designing and management of seasonal landscapes are largely a question of providing for the necessary planning infrastructure to bring people to an area, and of providing the equipment and professional management necessary to ensure the desired quantity of scenic elements (e.g. snow or sand). However, “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place”, as Tuan wrote, “as we get to know it better and endow it with value . . .” (1977, p. 6). If people return to a given ski lodge year after year it may become endowed with place identity. The situation is qualitatively different, however, if we are dealing with landscapes with an historical place identity, established through generations of liminal events.

In a place like the Norwegian city of Trondheim (which literally means the home of the Trønder people), winter is not a pictorial postcard, divorced in time and space from the city, but a season which permeates the entire landscape and is built into a rhythm of liminal seasonal events going back, no doubt, to the Trønders’ thing on the neighbouring island of Frosta. The city is surrounded by hilly common lands that, when the winter cross-country skiing season begins, become a liminal region where the citizenry meet as a communality, on tracks maintained by local voluntary organizations. On campus, in the city, the foreign geography professor may have power over the students, but not before the professor is seen on the slopes will he or she gain the kind of respectful authority accorded to a member of local society. Spring brings with it the Easter holiday, when many of the Trondheimers, along with large numbers of other Norwegians, return from the cities to the snowy mountainous regions where they have their family roots. Here, a population that is not normally known for its openness or hospitality, finds itself sharing hot chocolate and coffee.
(holy potions in Scandinavia) with near strangers around bonfires in the snow. These Trønder seasonal landscapes are, in their own way, as designed and planned as those of the Los Angelino’s ski resort, but there is a huge qualitative difference deriving from the necessity to take cognizance of a pre-established history of liminal, place-building, customs. For the Trønder it is not the picture-postcard scenery that is primary, but the maintenance, often by voluntary groups, and collective action, of slopes by and for a local communality.

For many of Northern European background, the onset of winter is identified with the liminal rituals of Yule. The Yuletide season involves a contrast of elements such as the dark, cold white space of the outdoors, and the cozy candle and Yule log reddish-yellow light of the indoors. It is a cyclical festival of light in an endarkened world that can only be fully appreciated if one has suffered through the seemingly endless winter night of the northern latitudes. This is the Yule of a large percentage of the world’s Christmas cards. The seasonal landscape of Yule is of importance to both the natives of a place, and to the visitors who wish to share its warmth, and this must be attended to by both the student and the manager of seasonal landscapes. The Yuletide season landscapes of places like Copenhagen or Trondheim express a recognizable place identity, tied to local liminal rituals, that engages both native and guest.

Conclusion

To the student of landscape, as well as to the landscape planner, designer and manager, it is important to distinguish between differing modalities in the conceptualization of landscape and seasonality. The logic of the absolute geometric space of the map and central-point perspective prospect, and the chronometric time of the calendar, is qualitatively different from the liminality of place and seasonal holidays. In the latter case, it is the content that defines the seasons, not the regularities of a quantitative system of measurement. This distinction is critical when it comes to work with seasonal landscapes, because they can be defined in terms of either modality. Thus, in some instances, seasonal landscapes are relative to particular parameters in absolute space and time, whereas in others they are relative to the liminal rituals by which places and landscapes constitute their identity as the place of a community. Landscape research, planning, management and design should ideally be cognizant of both ways of thinking about landscape seasonality, just as they should also be aware that they are qualitatively different, and not readily compatible. Vive la différence!

Notes

1 The time geography of the Lund school, Sweden, was translated to mean ‘space–time’, but it also appears to have been inspired by the older notion of a ‘space of time’, which is still found in the Swedish ‘tidrymd’ (see Olwig, 2002a).
2 ‘While’ is etymologically related to various Germanic variants, including the Danish ‘hvile’, with such meanings as pause, rest, time, hour and repose (OED, 1971, ‘while’). A word with a similar meaning, ‘stound’, is now archaic English, but persists in the Nordic variant ‘stund’, which still contains the associations with period of time, pause and rest, and which appears to be related to stand (Bjorvand &

3 This might explain, if one goes out on an etymological limb, why the Latin word for threshold, ‘limen’, is etymologically related to the Germanic word ‘limb’.

4 I have written more extensively about this subject in Olwig (2002b).

5 According to Heidegger: ‘The Old German word thing or dinc, with its meaning of a gathering specifically for the purpose of dealing with a case or matter, is suited as no other word to translate properly the Roman word for thing, res—that which is pertinent, which has a bearing. From that word of the Roman language, which there corresponds to the word res—from the word causa in the sense of case, affair, matter of pertinence—there develop in turn the Romance la cosa and the French la chose; we say, ‘the thing.’ In English ‘thing’ has still preserved the full semantic power of the Roman word: ‘He knows his things,’ he understands the matters that have a bearing on him; ‘He knows how to handle things,’ he knows how to go about dealing with affairs, that is, with what matters from case to case . . ..’ (1971b, p. 175).

6 Dvæle in modern Danish.

7 The etymology of the word ‘be’ in various languages has been an important source of Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological theory of being (Heidegger, 1971a). In this essay I am not concerned with phenomenology, but merely with the legal and political implications of historical notions of being and dwelling within a legal community.

8 The meaning of ‘Snaps’, and the location of the ancient Jutland ting, is shrouded in mystery. Within historical memory the Snapsting was held within the town of Viborg (whose name suggests a holy place), but in ancient times such rings, as with the case of the Icelandic Thingvellir, were held on neutral common land outside the urban centres. The ancient location of the Snapsting is a matter of speculation. The word ‘snaps’, in modern Danish, is the name of a spirit also known as aquavit, but it is an open question whether the two words are linked. It is certain, however, that great quantities of snaps were drunk at the Viborg market (Olwig, forthcoming).

References


Holy Bible (1952 (orig. 1611)) King James Authorized Version (New York: Oxford University Press).


