

THE LANDSCAPE OR THE BUOYANCY OF OUR REPRESENTATIONS INTO SPACES “*FLUCTUAT NEC MERGITUR*” ?

Abstract: A Chinese proverb says that the landscape is ahead and behind our eyes. The landscape does not have a physical reality in itself, but comes from the close relationship settled between a space and its observant. This mental representation of spaces will take the form of the observant cognitive topography through emotional, sensitive and cultural filters. It is particularly meaningful that the first appearance of the word “landscape”, in western countries, comes from a pictorial movement during the 16th century. People were first introduced to landscapes in paintings and then saw landscapes into the nature. Thus, the landscape experience is a homogeneous composition of sensations creating a coherent aesthetical (from the Greek *aisthêsis*, « sensation ») world. As shown by Petrarque climbing the Ventoux Mountain (South of France) in 1336, the landscape sight is a distanced look, reconciliation for Petrarque with the “order of the world”. The nature and the composition of landscape representations hold the signs of the relation types that humans maintain with the “cosmos” (from the Greek *kósmos*, « organize world ») over one place. The contemporary awareness about landscapes goes with the 20th century environmental overthrow. If landscape appreciation holds an aesthetical control on the surrounding, environmental assessment will be the ethical control. As the world is closing down there are no more elsewhere directly reachable as much with our body than with our mind. The holistic principle invites us to find the appropriate way to live and to interact according the identity of each place on earth.

Key-words: Landscape, mental representation, aesthetic, ethic, identity, citizenship, social well-being, environmental integrity

INTRODUCTION

Everything is in a perpetual flow on Earth. Nothing stays with a constant and static shape. The flow is becoming faster. Territories are rebuilding; spaces are rearranging according to new strategies and new needs. Familiar landmarks are erasing and the meaning of changes is becoming obscure. Landscapes that seemed immutable are clearing out within a couple of years whereas it needed centuries for their appearance.

Recombining times are confused. Landscapes are the prisms that reveal transformation of our societies, economies, and ways of life. They speak about us, their authors, about our own modifications, even before those modifications can be handled within statistics.

Starting from the landscape concept occurrence in painting, we will attempt to see how the landscape questions today our societal and individual aesthetical and ethical interactions with spaces, when Nature and Culture look forward reconciliation.

Western evolution of Landscape representations (Nature and Culture spreading apart)

During the occidental antiquity, representation of nature had the function of giving an idealize image of existence. The world was regarded as continuous, homogeneous and isotropic, Euclidean mathematics reigned and the perfection of nature forms revealed the perfection of existence itself. Then, during Christian middle age and Renaissance, artists conceived the landscape as a divine work and the landscape held a role strictly functional in a narrative context. The giving up of the perspective laws during the Middle Ages revealed the holy nature of the society architecture and of the world’s representations. Landscape from Albrecht Dürer and Leonardo da Vinci, real photography of the natural environment, are magnificent exceptions surely not foreign to their scientist formations.

For the landscape, to appear to us as we know it, it was necessary that two types of artistic domestication of nature to be developed: the one in act, operated by the art of the garden and the one, indirect, laboriously operated on the look from the creation of vision, perception and delight models. As the Copernican revolution goes by and nature starts to

laicize, landscapes become more dynamic and obtain an organic and systemic cohesion. Landscape's representation also starts to illustrate more purpose, and become the image of an idyllic or heroic nature. The Flemish and the Dutch showed the landscape as the seasons goes by, and represented the living and emotional nature of the environment. During the Romantic period, representations of landscape were the medium of subjective experiences, and the sign of divine reveal from the power of nature.

Exact observation of nature and the new realism opens onto the optical art of Impressionism. The real matter is the expression of an inner feeling rather than a sensitive reality. The landscape is dissolving, thus, into abstraction and announcing the 20th century "die-landscape". The landscape becomes a frame, a subject totally and irreversibly outdated, more propitious to nostalgic feelings than to the desire in anticipating the human liberation from environment. The artificial world, built in order to satisfy the human will of power requirement, is considered as the only worthy environment according to its new life condition. Thus, art is not a by-product of the species, but appears to be exactly the contrary.

Landscape as a concept

Today, the landscape dimension of territories perform a revival, abandoned for about fifty years and it was rehabilitated at the beginning of the eighties in questioning the model of growth and its disastrous impacts on environment, everywhere in the world. Definitions for landscape found today into dictionaries: "visible features of an area of land", are contrasting with the one adopted by the European Council of Florence ([European Landscape Convention 2000](#)): "Landscape is a piece of territory which may include coastal and/or inland waters, as perceived by populations, the appearance of which is determined by the action and inter-action of natural and human factors". The European Landscape Convention integrates at the same time the impact of the phenomenological movement and those from the systemic approach into the landscape appreciation.

The contrast between these definitions shows us the transition between an objective reality of the landscape and its nature of mental representation. This, questions the classical paradigm based on the existence of an objective "reality" that an observant would be able to discover. Since the cradle, we adopt this way of seeing and thinking, as noticed by the critics against the "occidental way of thinking". Indeed, we perceive, we interpret and we communicate the landscape. Our perceptions of landscape are done through the filter of our desires, beliefs, and emotions culturally marked, so much that we believe them natural ([Partoune 2004](#)). The landscape is an appearance and a representation. Thus, the landscape might represent in the same time an object (systemic approach) and a mental representation (phenomenologic approach) that we extirpate from a space. Then, the scientist work consists in explaining the landscape as an object and interpreting the landscape as a mental representation.

Lately, several disciplines have reinstated the landscape as the focus of their research. Different typologies are explored according to the authors in order to classify landscape dimensions and organize the different looks from all disciplines dealing with landscape ([Sauvé 1994](#), [Tress 2001](#), [Partoune 2004](#), [Jacobs 2006](#)). Yet, transdisciplinary studies and cooperation are required to tackle the various environmental and social problems related to landscapes. This can be achieved with the help of innovative approaches and research methods, in close cooperation among landscape researchers from natural sciences, social sciences, humanities and arts, as well as the professionals involved in all phases of land use decision. Inhabitants of that place should intervene to make the balance, stopping the investigator with contradictions, to specify the facts, complicate, and inflate life in their landscape. Indeed, process at work in territories must be at once identified and oriented, at least preferred, in order that we remain responsible and co-responsible inhabitants.

SOCIETIES AND LANDSCAPES

“Build, it’s collaborating with earth: it’s put a human mark into a landscape that will be modifying forever.”

Marguerite Yourcenard, extract of Mémoires d’Adrien.

The 20th century die-landscape

During the 20th century, territorial planning policies strongly denied the landscape perspective to the advantage of economical rationalization and development. In fact, technical evolutions of agricultural, forestry, industrial and mining productions as well as practices as regarding regional planning, urbanism, transports, networks, tourism, leisure and more generally global economical changes, contributed to the deterioration and vulgarization of landscapes. Yet, the landscape is recognized today as an essential element of the individual and social well-being and quality of life, it contributes to the development of human being as well to the identity consolidation.

The landscape in the context of environmental awareness

At the European scale, the European Landscape Council of Florence establishes the general juridical principles leading the national policies on landscape and institute an international cooperation for these matters. However, the interest for landscape stays quite unequal and if attends are made in order to preserve exceptional natural or patrimonial landscapes there are a great deal of frictions for common living environments as urban and rural for example. The variety of values attributed to landscape is a source of conflict between all the spatial actors. If natural exceptional landscapes have to be preserved as earth patrimony, a proof of the slow adaptation and equilibrium between geosphere and biosphere over immemorial times, giving a unique aesthetical identity and biodiversity to a space, rural and urban landscapes should represent original adaptations between Nature and Culture over spaces. Do we have to consider the landscape as an inheritance and a common weal, or should we accept its evolution with human development and economical growth? Indeed, landscape is widely representing political and economical principles managing our society. The success of environmental control may only come from a dialogue between all the actors of our society, under a political arbitration, the user welfare being the ultimate goal (Pitte, 1992). This questions as well the interconnectivity existing between all the policies (agricultural, urban, environmental, economic...).

Recently, the [PRELUDE project \(2007\)](#) of the European Environment Agency assessed environmental implications of land use and land cover changes in Europe in a participatory scenario exercise. The scenario generation reflects different future pathways of European land use and portray the stakeholder view that a crisis is necessary for triggering a change in current policies and behaviour. Five scenarios are represented by a set of 20 driving forces, and show how politic wills as well as individual and collective networks will conduct either to landscape and social emulation or at the contrary to dilapidation with social and spatial segregation. If the authorities have the responsibility to define the general framework that allows insuring the landscape and environmental quality, every citizen has to contribute in preserving this quality.

FROM AESTHETIC TO ETHIC

"The true voyage of discovery does not consist in seeking new landscapes, but to have new eyes".
Marcel Proust

The aesthetical look

Lauer in 2005 recalls us that the only way that nature will speak to us, that we will recognize the inherent value of the earth, is if the things are able to show themselves to us. Moreover, the only way for this to occur is if the phenomenological experience, like the aesthetic experience, is sited in the particularity of places. Without an awakening aesthetical feeling, reality does not become landscape. For instance, the French painter Cézanne could write to his friend Gasquet, that farmers from the area of Aix (south France) had never seen the Sainte Victoire Mount. We must translate that they did not see a landscape, since they did not aesthetize the mountain. Therefore, the landscape concept reminds us that to live in a space is an art, art to tame spaces in their diversity and their complexity.

The landscape concept questions the nature and the composition of the daily perceptive environment. We are maintaining a perpetual cognitive relationship with the surrounding. Most of this relationship is unconscious and we are attracted or repulsed according to unconscious instincts, desires, and emotions. Beyond exceptional and beautiful landscapes, which show magnificent composition homogeneity, sign of the balance that occurred over one place, most of spatial conflict and disturbances are taking place into common living environments. The aesthetical look of landscape in these places have to eclipse, to hide certain part of the surrounding as if we try to listen at one particular piece of music in the midst of a loud resounding environment. The brain will recompose the message but most of the pleasure will be lost and even stresses and tiredness might come from this constant attention maintaining a coherent relationship between our sensations over one place.

The mind borrows its perceptions from material where it derives its feeding; it returns them to him in a form of motions where it printed its freedom. So, each one of us, in the presence of landscapes, is firstly living in a territory, with its own preferences, its tastes and colours "which are not discussed", reviving a very early human experiment, which is to like and to dislike, and thus to feel an emotion which is about of aesthetical nature (Ferrier 1990). Then sometimes we try to clarify a bit the filters that allowed us to pronounce. These cultural filters, as soon as they are acknowledged or only sensed, make us, in the name of freedom, try to understand them; because, freedom is definitely the workmanship of our mechanisms.

For Serres in 1968, the man is a node of communication network with possibilities of filters; but spaces are multiple and only the *transcendence* of the subject allows their unions. Thus, concerning the landscape, interpellated by all our cultural history, its crucial stages and relation with technology, we are obliged "to dismantle" the mechanisms which surround our immediate relation with the world, the one of our face-to-face with places, and signs that we see there, inseparable from the affects that move us. Here we are, obliged "to reflect", in the deep-seated sense "to return", to return "reflections", those of our opinions and feelings, as soon as we decide to express them, to exchange them, to build an intersubjectivity who is the paramount meeting with the other.

From aesthetical landscapes to environmental ethic

To be conscious of this landscape evaluation inter-subjectivity, There are a great deal of ethical consequences. How not understand that our preferences involve a questioning about other's preferences. Daily acts within the most familiar space, while touching all the categories that form the universe screen, can have repercussions in the macrocosm. In any human being remains a demiurge, potentially creative (or destructive) of the general harmony.

Therefore, widely accepted aesthetical landscapes hold signs about this organized world, this dynamic equilibrium of spaces compared with entropy of chaotic systems. A beautiful landscape is ecologically correct until contrary proofs. Indeed, the landscape

concept is competed and completed with still wider: Environment, haziness concept submits to an ethic of responsibility that to not denied aesthetic but make it a subaltern indicator.

Still landscapes represent the widespread way to appreciate places and invite us to enter into a society of culture, to be a social subject, responsible for himself, for others, for living places and for natural and cultural stakes inscribed into territories. Definitely, there are no men without places nor territories, and there is no true territory without sufficient sociality.

LANDSCAPE AND IDENTITY

"Where ever I go, I'm a piece from the landscape of my country"

Fatos Arapi, Extract from Adieu.

When Nature and Culture recompose the local identity

In our modern societies, reflections about landscapes cannot be split from the growth of intimacy and decline of sociality. Intimacy progress, sociality regrets, thus call fields of necessary innovations, because there cannot be precisely solidarity into a society without sufficient sociality. This is a vast cultural and political stake, which calls territorial and landscape innovations (Ferrier, 1990) in order to find dialogue areas, the new agorae.

Paradoxically, this intimacy growth carries also an identity lost. Territories on earth are almost all cartography and every piece of land belongs to a national authority. This contraction of the world coming with the spatiotemporal closing up bringing from transports and communications makes somehow the world uniform. The lost of biodiversity and the lost of aesthetical landscapes arise from the same development model that goes in every part of earth, carrying the same pack of objects, abilities and cultural models in the name of economical growth. However, the sustainable development calls a global reflection for locally adapted actions in order to take into account the unique combination of environmental, social and economical influences over one space. Consequently, a landscape ought to represent a unique arrangement of possible sensations from a place giving to him a particular identity. As the biodiversity is recognized as a wealth and an indicator for ecological integrity, diversity of landscapes that may call an aesthetical feeling should represent an indicator for a good adaptation of culture over nature.

Pascal asked: why not take Culture as a second nature and Nature as a first culture. The concept of landscape put away the old dichotomy between Nature and Culture and questioning identity of spaces it question as well the individual identity. There is a hierarchy operating from macrocosm to microcosm. According to the focus, different individuality will emerge but in most of cases, individuality from the higher scale would have a greater influence upon individuality from the lower scale. Thus, culture exists only because nature exists and human individuality exists only because there are higher level. If our individuality comes from a particular combination between innate and experience, these one are already a result from an adaptation between nature and culture. Therefore, individuality happens in the midst of a territory and a society, irremediably linked together.

Sociality, education and citizenship

All the concerns regarding to landscapes aim to recall men in their territory and their society in order to delight landscapes again. An educational awakening seems to be the triggering starting point because a distanced look operates only with the sacrifice of innocence. A lot of work must be done such as to activate a participative involvement of the public at least at the local stage within participative democracy and participative budgets. It is a necessity to have a strong civil society being able to initiate a democratic ascending movement toward the descending democratic motion from governments. Facing the rate of changes, the inertia of social behaviours evolution and the emergency in preserving

landscapes and environment, we should hope that the development would bring a part of its own implements in order to remedy to itself.

Therefore, contrary to what was thought before, cyberspaces and virtual reality are not the end of territory but Internet is maybe suitable for reinforce social and local networks links. Suitable for compensate the globalization of the culture, recasting over again a local identity.

CONCLUSION

The landscape is a character present into every context of our life, sum of all the phenomena and momentum that may enter upon resound with us over one space and (in most of cases) a part of the moment of "epiphany" : which means the instant when all things are suspended and when something essential appears. Recognizing a landscape into a space, it is being a part of its identity. Such as the painter trying to reconcile in a canvas the order of the world, today the landscape concept ambition to recall us, past and present cultural orders upon natural elements.

Nature and societies diversity is still representing a miracle, the one of god or the one of physics. Into a wise society, human beings will have subdued their ferocious instincts and will have learned to respect the Earth system, the only example of such environmental diversity that we know according to any cosmogony. Power goes with responsibility and humans just start to be aware of their place as gardener, responsible for the pleasure that we take and that we will take from the social wellbeing and the ecological integrity.

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