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editors

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LANDSCAPE...LANDSCAPING FROM WILD NATURE TO DOMESTICATED NATURE, OR NOT SO MUCH

PAULO REYES¹

The idea of landscape as wild nature has been gradually reduced to a sense of tamed nature under the name of landscaping in the architecture and urbanism field. Despite this being a fact, it is not possible to remain solely in this evident dualism. The main assumption here is the necessity to break this dualistic logic between nature and culture and think about landscape as a “form of life”, as Dirk Hennrich, the German philosopher, claimed in “Landscape as a forthcoming paradigm”, recognizing the human intermediate position between nature and culture, rethinking about

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this human in the ethical field, engaged with his/her existent place. This critical attention points to the reduction of the meaning of landscape to landscaping, and the consequences in relation to this is the main motivation for this essay.

The theoretical lens that will guide this line of thought is called the “Philosophy of the Landscape”, and it will cut through diverse lines of theory that Adriana Serrão pointed out: a way that correctly handles this movement’s criticism – from landscape to landscaping. I choose, concerning this matter, to find articulation points that I hope can contribute to the criticism about this reductional thinking about the landscape produced by architecture. We will discuss philosophical texts by Georg Simmel, Joachim Ritter, Rosario Assunto, Eugenio Turri, Arnold Berleant, Augustin Berque and Dirk Hennrich, to reflect on the sense of landscape beyond a cut-out guided by an *aesthetic* sense as a unilateral visual perception, routing to a sense of aesthesis as a multisensory perception through a situated and ethically engaged body.

I believe that this theoretical alignment through philosophy allows me to look at the sliding of the landscape notion, to the notion of landscaping in the main theoretical currents in the architecture and urbanism field throughout the 20th century, highlighting the present time, even though this does not show up explicitly. My thoughts are to think of this sliding from a transposition stand point; a sense of look-towards, present in the perspective given by the look to a body-here, the presence of an ethically engaged body situated in the space. Transiting through the main theoretical paradigms to the reduction of this sense over the landscaping figure, recognizing an attempt of total absence of a body by the superiority of the eye in this process, until reestablishing the presence of the body in an ethically engaged situation as a rescue possibility of another notion of landscape, is the main line of thought for this essay.

Landscape through the look

The landscape appeared for the first time in paintings at the end of the 15th century as a way of capturing the world. In the 20th century, more precisely in 1913, Georg Simmel in the text “*Philosophie der Landschaft*” (Philosophy of the Landscape) recognized it as a philosophical line of thought. The look's supremacy is the mark of the pictorial representation, reinforcing a rupture between the subject (the one who looks) and the object (the one that is looked at). The Renaissance perspective that holds the pictorial landscape also evidences a certain supremacy of the subject in relation to the object-world (object-landscape in this case), producing some kind of geometrical and compositional organization of the world. Architecture and urbanism as a disciplinary field will be the faithful squire and messenger for the idea of projecting the landscape, as though it were possible to *paisagear*² the world. This is the human pretension: to *paisagear* the world, which means, make it habitable and organized according to beautiful concepts. That is: *paisagear* the world is an attempt to beautify urban environments for the enjoyment of aesthetical pleasure. I will discuss this criticism towards architecture and urbanism, but beforehand I would like to recognize the landscape notions that support this position through philosophy.

Simmel postulates landscape as an observation of nature; he thinks about it as a cut-off unit and nature as continuous. The unit itself is a cut-off of a continuous that is nature, and not a compositive arrangement of isolated elements; distancing from an equal notion of nature is how Simmel describes landscape. In his conception, landscape does not mean

2 This verb is used as an act of projecting the landscape; from the neologism in the Portuguese language: *paisagear*.

anything by itself, but to itself, that is, it is not about the object's order, but about the subject's; that is why

a boundary, a way of being encompassed by a momentary or permanent field of vision, is really essential. Its material foundation or its individual pieces may simply be regarded as nature. But conceived of as a 'landscape', it demands a status for itself, which may be optical or aesthetic [...] (Simmel 2009, 06).

This status for itself places landscape in an apprehensive spot, and this spot marks a subjective position. Just as Simmel claims, it's a "state of the soul" – a soul that is not seen by looking, but, after all, is sentient. In this sense, the landscape is from a soulish order.

The landscape is the subject's possession: from an uninterested judgment from the subject as well as from an aesthetic look, as Immanuel Kant described it in "Critique of the Power of Judgment". Here, in the philosophy of the landscape, this uninterested sense is what creates the landscape notion according to Joachim Ritter. This German philosopher, in his inaugural text as rector of the University of Münster in 1962, presents his conception of landscape with a cut-out of the look. According to him, the landscape is when the look turns a part of nature aesthetically present to itself. Just as Simmel's thoughts, no isolated part is a landscape by itself; not even trees, nor watercourses, nor any other isolated element, but it is a landscape when, according to Ritter (2011, 105)

man delivers them without a practical end, in a "freedom" for fascinated contemplation, to find himself in nature. With this exit from himself, nature's face changes. What once was utilized, or was considered useless, while bleak land, ignored and unvalued throughout the centuries, become greatness, sublime and beautiful: it turns aesthetically in the landscape.

This conception of landscape as a cut-out of nature by the look influenced the architecture and urbanism field profoundly, as well as the conception of the French gardens drawn from a rational and geometrical logic stand point, favouring the apprehension of the look as a portrait of a restrained and domesticated nature for the urban man's enjoyment. This landscape included in the morphology of cities in the form of gardens, plazas and parks had its biggest model in pictorial representation and on the principles of Renaissance representation expressed in the figure of the perspective given to the look.

When the landscape enters the architecture and urbanism disciplinary field, it rapidly gets out of a situation of something that is distant, to the enjoyment of the look as an extension of the natural territory, to take on a technical position and planning, and a synthesized organization on the idea of design. The architects think they are *paisageando* cities, which means, keeping parts of nature in the space of gardens for human enjoyment as a simulated experience of an always-disjunctive natural. As a design, this manipulated nature is now called landscaping. Therefore, this term landscaping will refer to the representation, organization, design and planning of this portion of nature, while the term landscape will be related, in principle, to two matters: a territorial extension, a natural territory, and a subject who looks, always from a distance, in a broad view and macro scale. Thus, landscape turned into landscaping will not appear *in loco, in nature*, but reproduced in such a way as though it were a natural model performed on a micro scale, favouring the fine-looking aesthetical pleasure.

The French gardens, a small example from nature being the Gardens of Versailles, the biggest representative in the 17th century, will serve as a model to follow in two scopes: on the individual level as an experience from nature and in the collective as cities' beautification. Just like the Gardens of Versailles, Paris in the 19th century, starting from the Georges-Eugène Haussman, (the Baron Haussman)'s interventions, would beco-

me a model for the urban restructurings in a sense of opening the city to great perspectives while still featuring medieval features. These strategies of morphological reconstruction guided by an aesthetic sense of the beauteousness as a guide for the look to the cities ran throughout the world as the hereafter model.

In Brazil, chiefly from the beginning of 20th century, The Plans and Designs of Improvements and Beautification of Cities have expressed these morphological modifying strategies in a logic towards the opening of great perspectives to the look. The successive landfills in many Brazilian cities also join the Plans and Designs following the same strategies in the sense of gaining more habitable territory. Urbs advance over the natural. The most emblematic case in Brazil is the garden project for the Flamengo landfill in the city of Rio de Janeiro by Brazilian landscaper Roberto Burle Marx. Various cities, mostly capitals and urban centres, will be contemplated by this territorial extension. More recently, this redevelopment vision of the landscape as an organization of landscaping is being focused on urban border areas like deactivated wharves as well as coastal regions dedicated to tourism.

We can advance through this understanding of a landscape that treats territory as a whole for the design to idealize, based on the Italian philosopher Rosario Assunto's thoughts expressed in his 1976's text "*Paesaggio, Ambiente, Territorio. Un tentativo di precisazione concettuale*". Assunto perceives territory as a lifeless spatial extension; in this sense, it would have a quantitative and extensive value. From this extensive space, life would make sense from the notion of ambient. Thus, the ambience only exists when life conditions allow the individual to live in society as a collective, establishing a form of existence. In relation to the landscape, the understanding of Assunto's follows the same line of thought Simmer and Ritter proposed: it is a representation expressed in the synthetic form consciousness.

The relationship between these three spheres: territory, environment and landscape, helps us think of another leap that the field of architecture and urbanism made in its domestication movement of nature in favour of an inhabitation 'in small nature'. Placed as a simulacrum of wild nature in the form of a small nature landscaping, the landscape, in the hands of 'know-hows' of architecture and urbanism, took on another shape; entire cities in all their territorial extensions were thought as landscapes to be looked on. One of the biggest examples is Brasília: this Lucio Costa urban design with Oscar Niemeyer's main architectonic objects, follows the same logic of a landscape: to be contemplated from a distance, following not only the great perspective principals from the Renaissance, but updated by rational conceptions from Le Corbusier's modernism. Here, the landscaping restricted to the gardens gains another scale and presumption: it is possible to *paisagear* the landscape. It is the total pretension of a domesticated nature taken as an act of *paisagear*.

This know-how architecture and urbanism capacity of turning any scorched earth into something able to receive a design was the subject of criticism from Christian Norberg-Schulz, Aldo Rossi, Gordon Cullen, Kevin Lynch, the Krier brothers and many more. In this period, a more historicist movement becomes more dominant in the sense of rescuing sociocultural values of the territory. Little places substituted the great perspectives of the modern rationalism on the day-to-day scale. Here, the look meets the body. From a look that used to overfly the landscape in the modernist rationalism to a look situated in a proximate body. Despite the strong criticism of the former model, the landscape's sense presents itself reduced to the look. It is right to assume that it is the look which recognizes historical and cultural values, but nonetheless, the landscape is still a reduction of the express nature in the drawings of plazas and gardens.

This memory and historical salvation of the place present in architec-

tonic and urban reasoning has its representation in the philosophy of the landscape. Eugenio Turri (2011, 178), Italian geographer, thinks about the landscape from what he called iconema, that is, an

elementary unit of perception, as an interior sign of an entire organic group of one, as a synecdoche, as a part that expresses the whole or that expresses it as a primary hierarchical function, either as an element, that, better than the others, incarnates the genius loci of a territory, or either as a visual reference of strong semantical charge of the cultural relationship that a society establishes with its own territory.

The primacy of the phenomenological studies that organized the architectonic and urban thinking and practices around the look as a trigger of knowledge in the area give place to more abstract studies of the structuralist logic. During the 80s, Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson wrote an important book that tried to shift the excessive meaning given to the look. “The social logic of space” presents the bases of a theory that thinks of the space as an arrangement of centralities expressed in the harmony between convex spaces and axis, corresponding to more static and dynamic spaces. In this theory, the look disappears, but, with it, the body also disappears. We fully understand the structuralist logic of the language. The language in the space syntax is not thought of as a semiotic expression but as a structural metaphor. The morphology would function in the same way that the cultural part of the language would work for the grammatical and syntactical one. There is a limited set of structural rules that allow us to express various morphological realities.

In this theory, the sense of landscape does not exist, or at least it is not an issue. There is no differentiation between places in a territory, just intensities of possible co-presences. The problem of the landscape seems to disappear in this moment in favour of spatial readings that reduce infi-

nite visible features of the cities around the world into similar and limited patterns. We are in search of abstract patterns without the look and the body. If in the field of architecture and urbanism there is an emptying of the landscape as a problem to be looked into, in philosophy the studies on the landscape open new ideas; not as a clipping of the look at a distance anymore, but as a particle body of the landscape.

Landscape through the body

It is possible to think in another sense about landscape that exists apart from this look theory. American philosopher Arnold Berleant, in a text from 1993 called “The Aesthetic of Art and Nature”, in the opposite direction than Simmer or Ritter, would change the way on how to think about the landscape: not through the primacy of an aesthetic look, but under a surrounding one. In this way, we would be *looking* at the landscape, but we are *in* it. As Adriana Serrão (2011, 281) puts it:

...refusing the separation between subject and object, Berleant reiterates the thesis that man as a whole dwells within the “natures” that revolve around him, transforms him, and nature is transformed by him as well. It is not possible to defend strictly that he sees nature; once he lives in it, nature becomes part of what he is¹.

Berleant recognizes that Kant, with the notion of the sublime, allows for us to take away the focus from a control aesthetic and the frame of the look to an aesthetic of magnitude and, from what seems to be overwhelming, resulting in feelings of respect, admiration and dread. It is in this part of the Kantian reading that Berleant (2011, 291) believes that “indeed, the sublimeness is not in nature, but in our mood, and it is only through the idea of reason, the subjective construction of sense, that we can establish the cognitive order of intentionality”. And so the dimension

marked by what is huge not only approaches us, but also assimilates, Berleant (2011, 293) says:

when we perceive the environment from within, not looking at it, but being in it, nature becomes quite different. It transforms itself into a kingdom in which we live while participants, not observers. The consequences are not the deaesthetization, the confusion of aesthetic with the world of purposes and practical effect, exactly as was said in 18th century, but as an intense and inevitably aesthetical condition.

In this sense, the body presents itself in the landscape and not outside of it anymore. The landscape is in a vivid environment, says Berleant. This perspective of a body fitted into nature is closer to what we know in parks and English gardens, which, differently from the French ones, are not organized by geometrical logic with rigid compositions. On the contrary, they resemble some kind of wild nature. Berleant's contribution to the philosophy of landscape is important because he allocated the look's question to the situated, set body. But it still seems like a sense which in various sections of the text gets confused with "environment". There is a necessity to think about this body in addition to a physical presence, as an existential one, an existence ethically engaged with the body in which it dwells.

In addition, in this sense, geographer Augustin Berque in a text from 1993, contributes to the theory that the body should be thought of in an ethical manner, a mark of human presence on Earth. He introduces to the studies of landscape the notion of *ecúmena*, designating this notion to the inhabited part of the Earth (occupied by human presence), connecting this term to the *médiance* and the *trajection*, to problematize this relationship between the human and his habitat.

In an opposite direction to a more objective approach arising from

the scientific thinking in the 17th century, the phenomenal dimension of experience in the world is recovered. *Médiance* is thought of as the relationship between this subjective world and the objective world together, with no separation between either of them; *trajection* is the movement between these worlds in its interaction act. It occupies itself with the Earth's habitableness, thinking of it as an environment.

In another text from 2008, Berque introduces the term “landscaping thought” to designate this thinking about the landscape that not only looks, but above all, respects the relationship with the inhabited environment. This way, the landscape as a cut-out of the look does not exist anymore, as neither does the body, as a measurement of existence but as an ethical position that builds itself around the relationship between the human and the world.

This ethical position in relation to the thought about landscape also reverberates in the text, “Philosophy of landscape: think, walk, act” by Dirk Hennrich. In it, Hennrich radicalizes the thinking of landscape as a relationship between the Earth (the place) and humans (the “object” that dwells in this place), postulating a line of thought about the landscape as an ethical relationship between humans and non-humans in a universal habitat.

Hennrich thinks landscape in a political and aesthetical perspective, recognizing that the landscape as a “life form” loses itself in the ordination and planning processes from diverse territories. He defends the necessity of recognizing landscape in an intermediate position between nature and culture, putting it as a type of container both as human memory and non-human memory. In his words,

landscape carries the timeless traces (lines) of nature (or the traces that humans cannot testify) and time which is saturated with human activity. The disregard of this double

origin of landscape, and the narrow concentration on the rational planning and administration of landscape, eliminates the visible and invisible memory and, above all, the corporeality of landscape (Hennrich, 2019, 61).

Therefore, the landscape can be understood, according to him, as a body that carries its different types of humour and its memory. The aesthetic sense that would privilege the look in its perspective condition, according to Hennrich, gives way to the aesthetics, in the form of recognition and appreciation of the multisensorial sensibility in the relationship between natural and cultural together and beyond them. For Hennrich (2019, 63), “*ethics* is hereafter understood as it derives from the word *ethos*, which means in one of its essential significations *to dwell* and indicates the coexistence of human and non-human lifeforms and the act of dwelling in a universal and not only human way”.

To conclude

Returning to these notions of landscape and landscaping in architecture and urbanism, I propose a reconsideration about this relationship, beginning from the title of this text: “LANDSCAPE... LANDSCAPING from wild nature to domesticated nature, or not so much.”.

The urbanization model that is present at the base of practices that originated in the architecture and urbanism field as a transformation of the natural environment to an artificial one in all its capacities is not only modifying natural landscapes in their more wild and sublime faces, but is also depleting and transforming all the ecosystem, with severe consequences to humankind. This movement, that seems at first like a control and domestication of the natural and wild landscape in favour of life in the city, actually produces a notion of life that is against life itself. That means,

the artificial lives in the cities appear to be contrary to the natural logic of the world. It is a paradoxical perspective of human against human; of one that feels mighty in his/her own inventiveness and constructional capacity of a world while in opposition to the recognition of a logic that has been a norm on the Earth for thousands of years as a natural system.

The control starts, as seen throughout this text, at the pictorial representations; it passes from the reproductions of small areas of nature transformed into parks and 'human' gardens, and it finally arrives at the constructions of total landscapes expressed by new cities. However, the sublime dimension of the compositive look teaches us to respect and recognize the will of nature and the human incapacity to deal with this magnitude. In this sense, the control does not belong to the human but to nature and its frantic transformational power. Man has to recognize that nature does not allow itself to be domesticated.

There is no possibility of finding a place of resilience one with the other; it is only possible to see in these landscapes a place that belongs to the ethic in relation to the human and non-human existence in line with its territory. I conclude by saying in my own words the sentiments of Dirk Hennrich (2019, 64):

Landscape should therefore be considered as a life-form with a specific physiognomy and memory and as an existential part of human sensibility and world-experience. There is no possibility to feel 'Nature' or to feel 'World' or even 'Earth', because they are not experienceable in their totality, but there is the possibility and the necessity to feel landscapes, if we begin to recognize them as the multiple faces of the Earth and as the geographical territories where different life-forms, animate and inanimate entities, have their specific encounter.