

Notes on the Representation of the Heritage Landscape

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“The eye, which is called the window of the soul, is the principal means by which the central sense can most completely and abundantly appreciate the infinite works of nature”.
[Leonardo da Vinci 1975, p.11]

In the last three decades, a wide panorama of publications, theories and definitions on the landscape and its representation has opened up before us. In this brief text I will only try to offer, with the help of a few outstanding authors, some notes on the cultural reasons for a historical need that crystallized in the 17th century with the awareness of the landscape and the beginning of modern science, and that, four centuries later, has led to a concern on a universal scale: a new awareness of the loss of quality of the landscapes of cultural heritage. The optimism

of those ‘infinite works of nature’ that Leonardo da Vinci wrote down in his notebooks seems very far away.

The landscape and the camera

The English philosopher Owen Barfield (1898-1997) has suggested that the Aeolian harp and the *camera obscura* are the best symbols of the relationship between human beings and external nature, of the mind conscious of its existence in the world. In *The Harp and the Camera* [1] he analyses its conceptual history and its relationship with the evolution of human consciousness, introducing interesting reflections on the image that are very pertinent to our theme.

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The *camera obscura* surely had a medieval origin, although it may have been known in the classical world: in a dark room, the light that enters through a small opening projects an inverted image of the outside world on the back wall of the room. In this way, the complexity of the three-dimensional world is instantly reduced to the simplicity of two dimensions. The German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680, musician, botanist, Egyptologist and inventor) is credited with reworking this physical principle of light inside a box in which a tiny opening is closed by a small glass, which we now call a lens, with a mirror at 45° that projects the image onto the upper opening of the box. This and other no less dazzling inventions, such as the magic lantern, were recorded in his treatise on optics entitled *Ars magna lucis et umbræ*, published around 1645. If the camera is the origin of photography, the magic lantern is an evolution of the camera and, in a certain way, a precursor to cinema.

The *camera obscura* is the emblem of a radical change in the way human beings understand their relationship with the world. And more than an emblem, it is a symbol of post-Renaissance man. "It soon began to be used for practical purposes, in particular for making small-scale sketches of larger objects or associations of objects, especially for sketching landscapes. There, on the screen, the complex three-dimensional world in which we walk and move was conveniently reduced to a small two-dimensional image that the pencil only had to trace. In other words, this practical device produced, almost spontaneously, a result that many great painters had worked hard to learn to produce over many years, and in which they were only just beginning to succeed" [Barfield 2019, p. 36] (fig. 1).

Barfield here refers to the extraordinary gradual discovery of the secret of perspective, which he considers late in coming, considering the advances in geometry and optics in classical Greek art. The camera thus made it possible, through copying, to overcome the classical theory of art as an imitation of nature. "The next step in the camera sequence would eliminate even the pencil and the steady hand. For the camera obscura led to the invention of the daguerreotype and, thus, to that of photography" [Barfield 2019, p. 38]. Therefore, I believe that it is quite possible that this invention is at the origin and in the extraordinary development of landscape art in Europe which, as several authors have pointed out, allowed the appearance of the word 'landscape' itself at the beginning of the 17th century, both in Romance and Germanic languages [Clark 1949; Berque 1997; Baridon 2006; Maderuelo 2020]. "What

exactly is there when our eyes are open but is no longer there when they are closed? The names of the various attempts to answer this question would fill a couple of lines in a dictionary [...]. Forms, phantoms, idols, simulacra, effigies, films, are some of these names [...]. But they all have a meaning similar, at least in part, to that of the word 'image'" [Barfield 2019, p. 41] (fig. 2).

The image of landscape and art

We can therefore accept the thesis that it is landscape painting that definitively alters the way of seeing the world in Western culture. One of its great theorists is Régis Debray who defends in his 1992 book, *Life and Death of the Image*, the indissoluble link that unites art to landscape, "a link that, beyond an automatic conceptual reference, tends to reveal such a necessary, mutual and vital dependence to the point of being able to hypothesize the probable disappearance of one in the face of the disappearance of the other" [Neri 2021, p. 24]. Debray's stimulating proposal is that "nature and art are abstract categories that do not really exist independently of each other. Some art has generated our nature. And some nature generated our art." [Debray 1992, p. 162]. The underlying logic seems evident: "There have always been mountains, forests and waterways around inhabited sites [...]. But nature does not create the cult of natural beauty nor the presence of carved images aesthetic sensitivity. The spectacle of a thing does not come about with its existence. The proof: it took the West two millennia to establish, frame, make evident and highlight this outrage against God, this egocentric subversion, this artifice of interpretation that is the landscape [...]. Reproduction preceded the original, the 'in visu' formed the 'in situ'. Painters awakened the sites, and the landscapes of our countryside emerged from the paintings of the same name. The gaze on nature is a fact of culture, a culture that was visual before it was literary [...]. Historians of mentalities have taught us that the Mountain and the Sea are cultural institutions. The mediator notes that 'nature' and 'art' are abstract categories that do not really exist independently of each other. An art has engendered our nature. And a nature has engendered our art. Hence the question of today: when this nature is transformed, what remains of art? When this art disappears, what remains of nature?" [Debray 1992, pp. 161, 162] (fig. 3). When rivers and mountains, hills and lakes, trees and animals, seascapes and clouds are shown "framed", they



Fig. 1. Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). *Fuji from Gotenyama, in Shinagawa, Tokaido*, from the series of thirty-six views of Mount Fuji (*Fugaku Sanjurokkei*), Japan, 1830-1832 [Neglia et al. 2023]. The thirty-six views of Mount Fuji represent the most famous series of ukiyo-e prints, and the first one entirely devoted to landscape. These prints were the first views that later helped defining landscape –urban and natural– as an independent genre in the first half of the 19th-century.

allow the eye to select and show the subtle cultural and symbolic relationships that they maintain with each other. A triumphant pictorial genre, the result of a sensitivity long cultivated by precursors such as Joachim Patinir and Giotto, dominated artistic creation in the second half of the 17th-century and extended to artists such as Poussin and Caspar David Friedrich, William Turner, Claude Monet or Paul Cézanne, to name only some of its most conspicuous representatives, until the emergence of the

avant-garde movements of the 20th-century and, with it, the decline of landscape art.

For Régis Debray 'art and landscape are attitudes of conscience'. For more than three centuries, the existence of the landscape in the eye and, with it, in individual and collective consciousness, has driven forms of representation whose modes of operation were clearly interpreted by Kenneth Clark in his pioneering work *Landscape Into Art* [Clark 1949]. Although these forms of representation of

Fig. 2. Boris Ignatovich, *Eremitage*, 1929. Gelatin-silver bromide 36.7 × 45 cm, Ludwig collection [<http://www.nailyaalexandergallery.com/russian-photography/boris-ignatovich>]. Photographer Boris Ignatovich (1899-1976), a great innovator in photography and photojournalism. Aleksandr Lavrentiev, historian and director of the Rodchenko-Stepanova Archive, has said of Boris Ignatovich: "The tonal richness of Ignatovich's prints are of pictorial qualities. He turned his photographs into art because he understood the essential: he did not imitate painting".





Fig. 3. Catania. The rebuilt city and its new streets after the eruption of 1669. An important phase of the study of landscape is to discover those hidden narratives through the deep investigation of the palimpsest of the territory through the study of cartography, maps and historical plans. Territorialization processes are mainly based on historical cartography as one of the primary sources. This analysis allows us to detect and identify those territorial elements with patrimonial and natural value that have characterized the cultural landscape in different historical periods.

the world were not alien to the advances in the techniques associated with modern science, as Barfield has shown with the camera and as the information and communication technologies that have colonized our daily lives remind us every day, the landscape thus relies on technology as much as on the patient and sensitive gaze of human beings. As Rainer Maria Rilke has pointed out: "The latter are understandably the artists: poets or painters, architects or composers, solitary people at heart who, turning to nature, prefer the eternal to the transient, the deeply regular to the ephemerally grounded; men who, unable to persuade nature to participate in their lives, recognize their task in the duty to understand it, in order to find their own place somewhere in its grandiose order. And thanks to these solitary individuals, all humanity is drawn closer to nature. Is it not true that the greatest and perhaps most singular value of art lies in being the medium in which man and landscape, world and form, meet?" [Rilke 2010, p. 19]. These are thoughts that are as true as they are distant because we have the feeling that the landscape has been confined within the limits of a discipline, landscaping, "which

has progressively isolated it, often in an inexpressive and digitalized simulation, relegated to a place of ornamental exercises and exhausted feelings that select from nature the quintessence of the pleasant and the fleeting, leaving everything else to weather reports and news of environmental disasters" [Neri 2021] (fig. 4).

Debray adds: "It is not that the desire for art and landscape has capitulated. On the contrary, it is stronger than ever, if one takes into account nostalgia. And that is precisely the delicate point: now a meticulous will is needed to revive the contours, to restore the prestige, because they have left behind the prose of everyday life and the instinctive character of the gaze. They have become matters of planning, celebration, direction, inspection and regulation; of landscapers and animators; land planning; management of natural parks; delegations of the plastic arts; protection of sites; ministries of the Environment and Culture. Landscape and art were once experienced, now they are constructed. As if they were being managed for a diligent survival. End of enjoyment, back to technical solutions. Assigned to regulatory reserves and green spaces, discarded from our everyday life centers, photographed, theorized and gridded, the postmodern landscape mockingly echoes heritage culture" [Debray 1992, p. 170].

The malaise of the landscape

The human being is not a 'lazy spectator' of nature, but a structural element of the world that contemplates, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, a part of nature itself; to the point that we have to accept that nature, and with it landscape, is the reflected image of our conscious and unconscious self. That "reflected image" is part of nature. And we can also say, in the absence of a more detailed argument in these brief pages, that the greater the degree of consciousness of the person, whom we can now qualify as an artist, the greater the heritage condition of the landscape. To this we must add, as Franco Zagari already pointed out a few years ago in the pages of this magazine [Zagari 2019, p. 13], the project must always be present in all types of landscapes and, we can add, this is even more true when it comes to the landscapes we love the most, those of heritage. Nowadays, the concept of landscape has complemented the vision of the 1960s by expressing the need to include, in addition to maps and geographical and ecological plans which collect tangible and material data, the representation

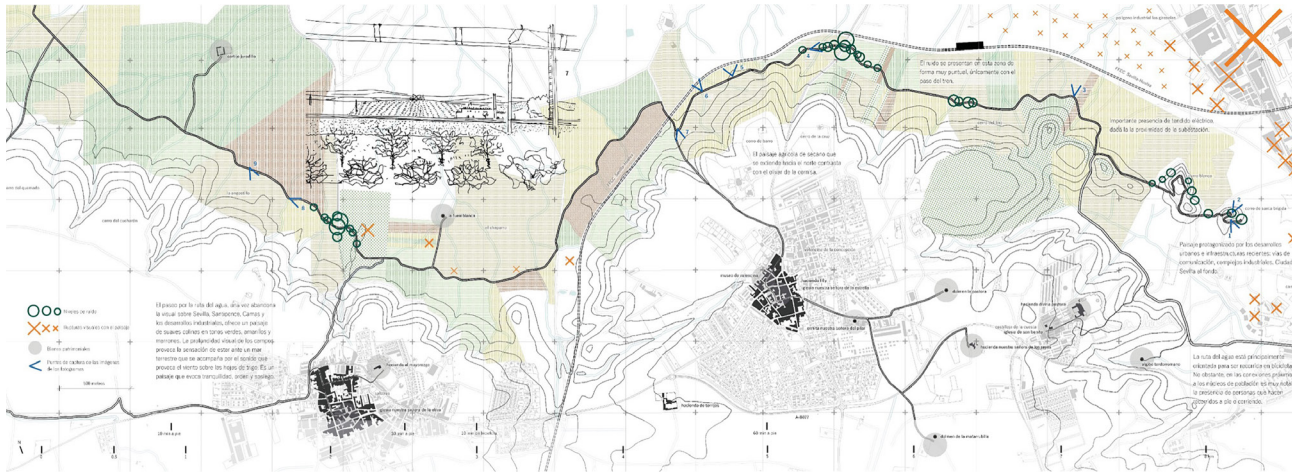


Fig. 4. Marina López, Graphic interpretation of information taken within the territory on landscape synthesis around the municipality of Valencina de la Concepción and the Ruta del Agua [López Sánchez, Linares Gómez del Pulgar, Tejedor Cabrera 2022]. The landscape is analyzed through data collection that records the visual and sound perceptions experienced during the walk. A system of graphic codes is used for this purpose, drawn on a map printed on paper, accompanied by written annotations, sound recordings, photographs and sketches, as shown in the image.

of those intangible layers that refer to the identity of a community, to its sociocultural condition. The contemporary idea of landscape encourages a holistic vision of heritage that, dispersed throughout our territories, demands an interpretation that allows us to define the interrelations between its components and the environment. Hence, the graphic and cartographic representation, a kind of chronicle of memory, will help us to develop the relationships between elements, routes, events and dynamics of activities that go beyond the understanding of the territory as a physical support, as we come to understand it also as a social and cultural network of production, collaboration and communication of the life of the human being who inhabits it.

The representation and analysis of territorial data linked to the cultural experience of our tangible and intangible heritage is one of the current challenges in reconstructing the landscape. Likewise, for the landscape project, the requirement to make the territory competitive through the potential of its cultural heritage with renewed models based on endogenous values of the places that make it up is a challenge [Linares Gómez del Pulgar et al. 2024].

In the current global context, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become the protagonists

of all the digital processes that we carry out daily, at all levels and scales. The technological revolution, access to large volumes of data and the preceding conceptual experience configure a space for research and graphic creativity in which the objective of the representation is not the visualization or validation of a formal and stable situation, but rather the possibility of showing other dimensions in the territory not always investigated by the usual cartographies, such as the unstable, the mobile or eventual, the simultaneous or the multidimensional [Vicente-Gilabert et al. 2023]. The drawing destined to project and communicate the specific creative idea is complemented by the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), graphs and experiential and perceptual cartographies, since they allow us to analyze all possible relationships between assets and the environment, all the links between the human being who inhabits the territory and the tangible and intangible heritage that, together, constitute the cultural landscape. Graphic representation is the emerging, holistic, artistic and scientific, creative and technical language, one necessary to encourage citizen participation, to promote dialogue between communities and thus contribute to a richer understanding of heritage,



Fig. 5. CRV Colonia Clunia Sulpicia, Peñalba de Castro, Burgos. Model of the Diputación de Burgos competition, 2017. Antonio Tejedor & Mercedes Linares. Under construction [Álvarez Álvarez, de la Iglesia Santamaría 2017]. The model interprets the idea of integrating the new building into the landscape of Alto de Castro, where the Roman city of Clunia is located. The existing vegetal territory expands over the roof of the Visitor Reception Center, sheltering in its interior the new public facility, without discontinuity of the vegetal mantle of the hillside.

ensuring with the project the sense of identity and territorial valorisation (fig. 5).

I conclude by returning to Debray, to raise a substantial question that he suggests is related to painting and that we can extend to all types of representation: "Today there is unrest in nature and in representation. The future of the forest is disturbing, as is the future of paintings. It is worth asking: can the landscape survive the failure of painting, or can painting survive the destruction of landscapes?" [Debray 1992, p. 169].

The question may seem misleading. Landscape art is based on the direct observation of the sensitive spectator of the world, including landscapes of destruction (as shown by the works of photographers Eduard Burtynsky or Emmet Gowin) while the representation of the heritage landscape

is directed towards the action of the artist who physically intervenes to stop its deterioration or to breathe into it new social life and a renewed cultural value. Debray does not seem to take into account this substantial difference between the landscape considered as an object of representation and the landscape as the object of the intervention project. The first is suffering a crisis as a pictorial genre; the second is in danger in itself, regardless of its representation mechanisms.

It cannot be excluded that in this ghostly and weakened presence of nature in the current representation of the landscape lies the germ of a new current that can permeate knowledge and action on heritage and landscape through increasingly sophisticated technological tools, such as algorithms for interpreting satellite data of the Earth's surface,

and the use of GIS, CAD, BIM, graphs or experiential and perceptive cartographies, which are faltering in the face of the emergence of artificial intelligence. Although innovative at an operational level and full of attractive theoretical suggestions, we fear that the third landscape will not be of much help in recomposing the fragments of a conception of nature shattered by contemporary culture, whose scope and consequences, even, are difficult to perceive.

Note

[1] The text includes the lecture given at Wheaton College, Illinois, on April 30, 1969, originally published in *Rediscovery of Meaning*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1997, and in Spanish

Wandering cautiously and sensitively between these two polarities crucial to the practice of landscape science –representation and landscape– in search of at least partial certainties, could be a perspective shared by artists, including architects, who draw on landscape and nature in their creative activity, shedding the contradictory illusion that one discipline alone is capable of constructing the future landscape.

with the title *El arpa y la Cámara* [Barfield 2019]. Here we will leave aside the role of the harp, referring the curious reader to the original text.

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