

NATURE, SPACE, AND LANDSCAPE AS HUMAN CONSTRUCTION

NATUREZA, ESPAÇO E PAISAGEM COMO CONSTRUÇÕES HUMANAS

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ABSTRACT

Taking as its starting point the phenomenological bases, where landscape is understood as the result of the man/place/world relationship, this essay seeks to address the concepts of nature, space and landscape, from the perspective of factual experience, and ontologically so-called “experenciador” (experienter). Facing the complex contemporary scenario, where the categories mentioned above undergo revisions and systematic conceptual expansion, we intend to discuss nature, space, and landscape as human constructions, historically determined. The theme is conducted through the analysis of meaning building that occurs from direct experience where landscape takes on the dimension of “mediação” (mediation) between nature and human.

Keywords: Landscape. Building of meaning. Historicity. Human production.

RESUMO

Tendo como ponto de partida as bases fenomenológicas, onde paisagem é compreendida como fruto da relação Homem/lugar/mundo, busca-se abordar as ideias de natureza, espaço e paisagem, sob a ótica do que se convencionou chamar de “experenciador”. Diante do complexo panorama contemporâneo, onde as categorias acima citadas sofrem revisões e ampliações conceituais sistemáticas, pretende-se discutir natureza, espaço e paisagem como construções humanas, historicamente determinadas. O tema é conduzido através da reflexão sobre a tessitura de sentido que se dá a partir da experiência direta onde paisagem pode ser lida como “mediação” entre natureza e humano.

Palavras chave: Paisagem. Construção de sentido. Historicidade. Produção humana.

NATURE AS PRODUCTION OF MEANING

Take nature as a synonym for “physical support,” and one is able to quickly conclude that its existence precedes us and, it seems, will outlive us. The set of natural phenomena has its positivity affirmed by physical presence - rivers, seas, valleys, hills, meadows, forests... are there, independently of our aesthetic appreciation, our perception, of our theoretical considerations. However, it would be naive to take this positivity as the ultimate definition of nature. After all, rivers, seas, valleys, hills, meadows, forests... are thus apprehended by the construction of meaning, the unique and constitutive characteristic of the human.

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The use of the term building of meaning must therefore be better analyzed, since building meaning is different from apprehending it: in the apprehension, we see ourselves as receptacles of sensations, atmospheres, bodily impressions that come to us from the "outside." This is, in fact, the traditional meaning that accompanies the modern stance, both for sciences and philosophy.

Traditionally, the external and the internal have distinct origins/causes and, therefore, distinct consequences – the very act of equating questions based on cause/consequence indicates a peculiar way of apprehending whichever phenomenon, as well as determining a center around which other phenomena gravitate, an axis from which a force emanates and impacts what is around it.

When, on the contrary, the building of meaning is affirmed as constituting the human, one enters into a different form of thinking. This statement in no way advocates the assumption that what surrounds us comes from us, from our form of internalization of the outside and that, without it, nothing would exist beyond our sensory world.

What is described here as building of meaning approaches the phenomenological view that reveals in a more radical way (going to the very roots of what happens) the manner in which Man and World relate. Indeed, one could not even name what occurs as a "relationship," since Man and World are one and the same thing. This means that there is no Man without World and that World is Man's project.

The understanding that the amalgamation of Man/World occurs in any and all situations has generated the Heideggerian concept of *dasein*, which means "Being there" (Heidegger, 1988). "Being there" means, first of all, that *dasein* is always "thrown into the World," draws its human project in the World and is guided by the possibilities that are given in the World, which is always historically given. *"...in Heidegger's thought, the metaphysical assumptions that have for centuries sustained our understanding of Man and the world are broken. In a conception where there is no room for more internal-external, subjective-objective, mind-world dichotomies, this new word 'Dasein' was needed ... to speak of this being which, in principle, is already being-in-the-world."* (free translation) (Sapienza, 2015).

And how does the World happens?

By World, Heidegger understands what embraces the human experience. In this sense, World has prevalence, World guides, defines and impacts *dasein*. To be in the World means to be immersed in the discourse of the World, oriented by the World project instituted long before us, which guides us and gives us a sense of familiarity and security: *"The world is not a totality of present or possible objects of representation: the world constitutes the being-there, as the ambiance within which its irremissible existence takes place, in different planes of relation. It is in the world that the being-there can be as a self or not as a self, remaining in the inauthenticity"* (free translation) (Giacóia, 2013).

By being in accordance with the path of the existential analytic, it is possible to affirm that nature is given as nature only and always in the intersection with the human, that is, in the intersection of the World project and the meaning project that opens itself, each and every time.

In other words, the experience of nature can only take place in accordance with the meaning opened by the World, in a certain historical time. That is to say, that in the event of the extinction of our race, natural phenomena would continue where they are, but they would no longer “show up,” no longer “appear” as rivers, seas, valleys, hills, meadows, forests... That is to say, nature is only nature because *dasein* so called it as a phenomenon that shows itself to it.

Without the presence of the human, nature becomes something unnamable, since naming is given only to the human as a resource for understanding.

The appearance of nature as rivers, valleys, hills... happens this way by the building of meaning; is given by a first apprehension, not thought of, to say so, which has as trigger a sensation, an atmosphere or “*stimmung*,” a term used by Martin Heidegger in “*Ser e tempo*” (1988) to designate what invades me, finds me, makes itself in me, but comes from something beyond me, and that can be used when we refer to the man/nature encounter.

Like everything else, nature comes to us, full of meanings produced by the World and by the possibilities that the World gives us each time. It is the World that guides us regarding how to perceive, to name and to experience the “nature phenomenon.” From this point of view, we are not given the possibility of abstaining from the World to better scrutinize it, as we are not given the prerogative to define nature apart from the historicity that constitutes the concept.

Jean-Marc Besse in “*Ver a Terra*” (2006) referring to Merleau-Ponty, tells us that the interpretation “*comes from the middle of the world*,” without “*looking from overflight*.” With this, the author reveals an undeniable truth: we are not authors of these interpretations (which includes, of course, the idea of nature), although we are an inseparable part of the interpretive network that covers the world and constitutes the hermeneutics of everyday life.

As Martin Heidegger has said in “*Ser e tempo*” (and as Jean-Marc Besse’s text stresses), World is a field of meaning given historically and it is this same field of meaning, always open and available, that gives us the possibility of relations with nature so rich and distinct throughout history: nature lived as uncontrollable and threatening, nature as a symbol of terrestrial paradise, nature as a means of self-knowledge, nature as raw material for technical advancement, nature at the service of human wills.

In the same line of reasoning, Besse (2006) emphasizes that the meanings assumed by nature and crossed by historicity are not a product of human subjectivity, much less gratuitous; they are rather the fruit of a subtle dialogue: the meanings of nature are given to *dasein* due to it being fundamentally a search for meaning, but they are also derived from what nature “*makes available*,” in a relation between “*beings*.”

Stating the importance of this relationship must go beyond an intellectual exercise.

In landscaping practice, the root of the man/nature relationship as a subtle dialogue in search for meanings may indicate possibilities. In addition to the morphological and geographical bases, nature can be thought of as a form of expression that has its historical nexus linked to the history of humankind. Therefore, the landscaping project should not

be understood as a result of a subordination to “physical nature,” nor as a result of the subordination of nature to human benefit. Project must therefore be apprehended as a form of understanding and concerning an almost mute and profound dialogue, which takes place between human and nature, long before any formal conceptualization.

POSITIONED SPACE AND LIVED SPACE

Now take the traditional concept of space. For the natural sciences, space is positioning, it is distribution and ordering of beings – the table is next to the window, which in turn is in front of the door; an island is a piece of land surrounded by water on all sides, etc. However, this positioning has in itself something “artificial,” it is situated in a late moment, since the first apprehension of space occurs also here (as in everything) even before any kind of reflection, evaluative position, analytic decoupage.

Our apprehension of space is first and foremost affective, which means that space is always “existential space” (Heidegger, 1988), space is something that affects me in one way or another. Thus, when I am far from my country, for example, a smell, a color, a light that penetrates establishes in me the longing and causes my city, my neighborhood, my house, my people to open to me immediately.

The moment this happens, my country is closer to me than that which I see myself physically surrounded, establishing for sure that space is relative to what affects me, what I care for anyway.

Again, reflecting about this concept should not be taken as intellectual whimsy. The reflection on space directly impacts the praxis of the landscaper, inasmuch as, willingly or unwillingly, the space he projects will always be full of meanings – not necessarily those he projected in his project – but meanings that open themselves in the lived experience in the intimate relationship between “experimenter” and “experienced space.” *“The phenomenological point of view, in geography, allowed the opening of new fields of research, raising the interest for the perceptions, representations, and attitudes to the space... In the end, it (the phenomenological point of view) made new bodies of information appear: the ‘discourses’, the literary, philosophical, religious traditions, or even the plastic arts, are today considered as bearers of geographical knowledges and meanings”* (free translation) (Besse, 2000).

Taking into account, therefore, that space is not a theoretical formulation, but a possibility of opening to impressions that “settle themselves,” it may not be enough for the designer to propose spaces. Perhaps in the design of landscape programs, it is first of all necessary to “listen” to spaces that even before a project are already pronounced, trigger sensations, feelings, perceptions.

LANDSCAPE AS A RELATION BETWEEN MAN AND EARTH

Take, at last, landscape, not as a geographical circumscription, but as the place of Man in the meaning of being, itself, manifestation of the human. *“What can landscape*

mean in this renewed perspective? It is understood less as an object than as... a value, a dimension of discourse and human life..." (free translation) (Besse, 2000).

Alluding to Éric Dardel, Jean-Marc Besse (idem) tells us that landscape is the manifestation of the human hand on Earth. Landscape is, according to him, a pre-reflective dimension; it is the world of the sensitive, a kind of anchorage of the human, since it is impossible to inhabit the Earth without being by and in the terrestrial landscape. In his text, Besse makes us see the distinction (proposed by Erwin Straus) between perceiving and feeling: "Perception is on the side of science, it is beginner science. It supposes, as effect, says Straus, a distinction between the perceiving subject and the perceived object... Straus develops an intellectualist conception of perception and a phenomenological conception of feeling... the landscape is the absence of objectification. It precedes the distinction between subject and object and the appearance of the structure of the object. The landscape is of the order of feeling. It is participation and prolongation of an atmosphere..." (free translation) (Besse, 2000).

It is necessary, however, to reflect a little more on the meaning assumed by "Earth." Undoubtedly, it is the geographical apparatus that holds human life, but not only. Here, Earth must be apprehended as that which witnesses the human trajectory, its longings, desires, projects, limitations. And even more than that, Earth must be thought of as "the one that brings forth and shelters. The Earth is the one that not being forced to anything is without tireless effort. On earth and in her the historical man bases his dwelling in the world." (Heidegger, 2010). Still Heidegger: "The world is opening that manifests the broad simple and essential decision-making paths in the destiny of a historical people. The Earth is the free appearance... World and Earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separate. The World grounds itself on the Earth, and earth juts through World" (free translation) (idem).

Earth is, then, that which is always present even without us realizing, which encompasses, as Heidegger says, our "ontological difference;" it is what does not manifest itself explicitly; it is abyssality that impacts and acts on us in a subtle way. Earth is what hides, shrinks, conceals itself... it is a constant call, which *dasein* does not always recognize, but that pulsates anyway.

Being the soil of human experience, Earth is, above all, feeling. Earth appears short of words, in an almost imperceptible gesture that affects us in full. And, to this extent, Earth and landscape are a kind of unison.

As a testimony of the human passage through the Earth, the landscape is plastic, malleable and interspersed by the projects of meaning that come to be over time, in accordance with the possibilities opened each time. Landscape is, therefore, History, and this concerns us in the first instance, because it is human production in any dimension that presents itself.

Following in the footsteps of Joaquim Ritter (LandscapeTextos1, 2013), landscape appears as mediation that brings nature to the human dimension (and here it may be asked if it is possible for nature to come to us in a way other than that of the manifest presence of the landscape).

In dealing with the thought of Joaquim Ritter, the philosopher Massimo Venturi Ferriolo (idem) calls us to reflect on the nature/society divorce, indispensable to enter the modern, and a symbol of the process of human liberation (and consequent submission of the natural) in relation to the nature. It is in this midst that the idea of landscape arises as a “feeling of nature,” which takes the place of the symbiosis that the ancients experienced in relation to the natural processes, and allows a kind of framing of the natural, through which it is possible to carry out a process of symbolization that brings nature closer to the human world. As Ferriolo tells us, *“What is the movement that creates the landscape and its individual character? The world of technique, the domain of practical science, intervenes in nature and transforms it up to its destruction. This process is History, world of man, of the useful, ‘second nature’. The awareness of a break between nature and history favors the birth of a nature to be contemplated. Ritter rightly observes that Alexander von Humbolt made explicit a universal concept: as soon as nature becomes object of the natural sciences, the aesthetic mediation of poetry and figurative art is produced”* (free translation) (LandscapeText01, 2013).

One can, therefore, think of landscape as mediation, because it is in the landscape that nature and space materialize unequivocally as the world of meaning and of the sensible, as a dimension of the human.

It is in the field of meaning opened by the landscape experience that - *“The moonlight when it hits the grass, I do not know what it reminds me of... reminds me the voice of the old maid telling me fairy tales”* (free translation) (Alberto Caeiro – Ficções do Interlúdio); It is in this same field of meaning that can arise the question - *“But for what, for what so much heaven, for what so much sea, for what? What good are the waves that break and the afternoon wind, what good the afternoon, useless landscape”* (Tom Jobim - Useless Landscape) or that is tasted - *“The fringe of the hillside, orange color”* (Caetano Veloso - Trem das Cores) mixed with *“... honey of these eyes, light, honey of an odd color”* (free translation) (idem).

It is also in the field of meaning opened by the landscape that space can be lived in a different way from the physical space, positioner of objects, as Caetano Veloso rightly reveals - *“Over the head the planes, under my feet the trucks, points against the chapadões my nose”* (free translation) (Caetano Veloso - Tropicália).

In each of these examples, and in thousands of others, landscape happens with arms given with nature and space, happens as human narrative, where what is revealed is production and lending of meaning, because landscape is only possible in the horizon of an intimate and primary relationship, prior to rationalization.

The landscaper may have the challenge of having *“eyes and heart wide open”* to understand what takes place, what happens, what is projected from his project. This would make it possible to meet a dynamic, living “texture” that speaks of human traveling.

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