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1.

The singularity of landscape lies in its equivocal and multifaceted nature and has been exploited by artists and rulers alike. Landscape was originally intended to eulogize the beauty of nature and the wealth of the one who commissioned the painting. It belonged to the domain of art but equally often featured in science and politics. Watched with admiration as a “natural representation of a natural scene” (Mitchell 1994, 15), it was designed with cynical calculation, as a carefully encoded message serving the purposes of manipulation. So, landscape presents an inspiring field for multi-aspectual, critical analysis.

In my research and creative work, I perceive landscape to be a dynamic category to be analysed in its complex relationships with power, chiefly in the colonial context—a sphere of the sacred which became a perfect instrument of ruthless economic and political exploitation.

Unlike nature untainted by civilization, landscape as a physical category bears distinct signs of human intervention. In simple terms, it might be referred to as “nature transformed by humans”. Its power derives from the fact that it belongs both to nature and culture, while the degree of proximity to either depends on the context. Jennifer Jane Marshall (2007, 200) suggests that it is the illusory promise of extra-cultural purity which turns it into such a powerful instrument of ideology. Thus, phenomenology can essentially reinforce ideology by accumulating purportedly natural and common-sensical categories of knowledge. The stronger the conviction that landscape is a category which is closer to nature than culture, the greater the susceptibility to the ideological codes it conceals. Potential and manifest innocence, neutrality or even sanctity made it a driving force of the colonial machine.

At this point, it would be worth examining the multidimensionality of the very term “landscape”. The fundamental distinction between a physical landscape in space, that is nature transformed by human activity, and landscape as a sight or a representation of nature does not exhaust the subject.

At the outset, one should perhaps examine the etymology of the English word *landscape*, an etymology which reveals its multi-aspectual nature and which also bears on the Polish equivalent—*krajobraz*. Denis E. Cosgrove observes that *landscape* may be derived from the Old English *landsceop* (view expressed

in Rachel Z. DeLue, James Elkins 2007, 135). *Scope* means a view, so *landscape* denotes an object of observation in time and space. Cosgrove's definition involves a clear division into the object and subject of the process of seeing. There is the observer and the observed. In this pageant, there is no place for a reciprocal relationship: not with an active viewer and the place which passively yields to the former's perception. Treating landscape as a view or its representation is one of the more widespread approaches, yet it seems insufficient for our inquiries into relations between landscape and power.

Anne Whiston Spirn takes a different position, drawing on the etymology of landscape in other European languages (view expressed in Rachel Z. DeLue, James Elkins, 2007, 92), citing the Danish *landskab* and German *Landschaft*. In both cases, *land* is not only a place but also the people who inhabit it—implying that they create and transform it. *Skab/schaft* both denote a relation, a partnership. Therefore, the Danish *landskab* or German *landschaft* is a mutual formation of people and a place. This is an active, bilateral relationship not founded on hierarchy. In the above definition, the purely physical layer of landscape seems to be important as well. James Elkins sees landscape as an outcome of fabrication, of physical, material transformation (view expressed in: Ibidem, 92). It is continually shaped by our presence. Whiston Spirn stresses that this physical formation, inherent in the idea of landscape, does not have to take place by means of hands, tools or machinery. It also takes effect via various laws and regulations, public policies, investments—whether implemented or suspended—as well as other actions sometimes undertaken many kilometres away (Anne Whiston Spirn's view expressed in: Ibidem, 93). The diverse means of shaping and transforming landscape, also indirectly, were universally used in the colonial era as manifestations of power. The modified landscape subsequently affected the people who lived in it. The definition according to which landscape is a network of reciprocal relations between a place and people tallies quite well with colonial realities.

Whiston Spirn is also the author of a definition of landscape as a language. As she asserts, landscape “is loud with dialogues, with storylines that connect a place with the people who live there” (view expressed in: Ibidem, 53), while “the language of landscape is our native language” (Ibidem, 52). Landscape is a natural environment of humans; people evolved among plants and animals, under the sky, on earth, over water. And everyone possesses that heritage, regardless of culture. All civilizations have an awareness of landscape, as attested to myths of creation of the human being and the world. Michael Baridon notes that even cultures which ceased to represent landscape, temporarily or permanently, never became utterly indifferent towards it, or “landscape blind” (Ibidem, 282). Relationships with it have been moulded since the dawn of humanity. Whiston Spirn stresses not only the primeval nature of language-landscape, but also its universality, drawing particular attention to the fact that “landscapes were the first human texts, read

before the invention of other signs and symbols.” (Ibidem, 53) Landscapes were even more than texts, as humans used them to share their experience with future generations; ancestors inscribed their values and convictions in them, manifesting while their thoughts and ideas (Ibidem, 53). Whiston Spirn precisely enumerates which traits of language can be found in landscape:

It contains the equivalent of words and parts of speech—patterns of shape, structure, material, formation, and function. [...] Like words, the meanings of landscape elements—water for example—are only potential until context shapes them. [...] Principles of grammar govern and guide how landscapes are formed, some specific to places and their local dialects, others universal. Landscape is pragmatic, poetic, rhetorical, polemical. (Ibidem, 53)

Landscapes of colonized territories were foreign dialects to colonizers, which is why they modified them so profoundly. They introduced their own rules, vocabulary and syntax in the shape of new plants brought from the metropolis and entire plantations relying on their own technologies. Just as indigenous languages were ousted and replaced with the language of the colonizer (e.g. English imposed as the official language of South Africa), the language of the native landscape was forced out as well. And although landscape-language possesses many universal properties, due to fear of alien dialectic elements that were typical of the region and the community, local landscape was annihilated and exchanged for a new landscape, one originating from the metropolis and strange to the local population. If landscape is to be treated as a language—with language being the most perfect means of expressing oneself—then no text nor landscape is ever fully innocent or free of subjective, if not downright ideological communication. In the colonial arrangement, landscape was established as a language of power. It was intelligible enough to facilitate the seizure, exercise and consolidation of power, without leaving much place for intercultural misunderstanding. It was a language which conveyed authority in a very direct fashion, truly changing reality, but it was also capable of encoding messages which were important for the imperial ideology in the discursive layer. Colonial landscapes are particularly “burdened” with guilt. They emerged as measures to enforce discipline, further exploitation, limit freedoms and provide disguise. They were direct instruments of power—and yet serving to conceal that power. Colonial landscapes are a camouflage. A camouflage obscuring the practices of power, hiding exploitation and making the newly-conquered territories resemble gardens of paradise transplanted directly from the metropolis. Moreover, it was a *theatrum* where the dramatic history of a great part of the world unfolded. Colonial landscapes were also a language, a language of power which harboured the encoded rules of imperial domination.

2.

If we assume that landscape is a relationship between a place and people, a language or a medium, where all of the aforementioned are entangled in a complex system of social, political and historical relations, then various fields of the humanities seem to be ideally suited to the study of landscape.

Art may offer an important channel by means of which issues relating to landscape can be propagated and subjected to a broader debate. While drawing on science, artists often take advantage of non-scientific methods to convey the acquired knowledge and reflection to an entirely different audience than the scholarly milieu. Art may constitute a platform where scientific communication is translated at the same time being a domain of in-depth reflection. With no claim to infallibility and total knowledge, artists often embark on issues addressed by the sciences or the humanities, portraying them successfully in art. The outcomes of artistic undertakings usually do not offer the conclusive findings or assertions one normally encounters in the scientific domain. Artists often operate in the realm of experimentation, while questions and the process are as important as the conclusions. Such an approach seems to be more relevant to the sensitive viewer, an individual ready for exploration but lacking a scientific background. They motivate viewers into action, involve them in the creative and analytical process, making them co-authors and expanding the circle of people who actively reflect on landscape.

3.

Due to the complexity of categories that the term of landscape subsumes, and the multi-themed interrelations between them, only interdisciplinary studies offer an opportunity for a more comprehensive understanding. An exclusively historical, political, artistic, biological or ecological perspective would be insufficient and would impoverish the tremendous potential of knowledge that the term implies. A thorough and broad understanding of the category or process that landscape represents is necessary if one is to develop a new perspective of human functioning—given the dynamic changes people witness, participate in bring about. In the era of the Anthropocene, when human impact is not limited to the surface of what we construe as the physical category of “landscape”, but reaches much deeper and affects geological formations as well, understanding and finding one’s new place in landscape should be our priority. Since landscape combines elements of both nature and culture and is above all a humanist category, being responsible for its shape and future we should employ all available tools of inquiry, those used in the research of the natural world and those serving to study the human world, to expand that knowledge and share it with others.

The fundamental perspectives which need to be considered in landscape studies include the standpoints of history, geopolitics, sociology, psychology, linguistics and

art history. It would also be immensely valuable, even indispensable, to combine the perspectives of the humanities and the sciences. The application of various research approaches may above all ensure that we arrive at an elaborate, complex picture of the analysed categories, supported by multi-aspectual, in-depth reflection. Such a composite method has the potential for intellectual exchange between disciplines and at the same time provides an opportunity to reach a diverse audience.

4.

Landscape education should constitute an integral element of the earliest stages of learning and development, fostering sensitivity to the complexity of landscape-related issues. The education should also encompass—in a suitable form—all generations, since today's adults bear the responsibility for how and with what awareness we transform landscape to suit our needs, how we manage that landscape and how much of its resources will be left to the generations to follow. These issues should be introduced in a context which goes beyond ecology, underlining the relational nature of landscape rather than our causative attitude towards it. At all stages of landscape education, it is vital to draw attention to the distinction between categories of nature and landscape, to the universality of transformations owing to human agency, their various motivations and the dynamic character of landscape (construed as a process and as a system of relationships—almost a animate entity—beginning with the microscale including bacteria, plants and animals, up until the macroscale of geological formations and meteorological phenomena). It is also important to emphasize our inseparable bond with landscape, not only as subjects who shape it, but as beings who are shaped by it as well. Given the circumstances, we can hardly speak of a “return to nature”—i.e. a category uncontaminated by human hand. We should rather see ourselves as integral elements of a landscape to which we do not have to return, since no one has ever managed nor will ever succeed in escaping from it. This means becoming aware that everything we do in the so-called natural world will be relatively soon felt in our everyday life. Just as we shape, transform, or even distort landscape, landscape is equally capable of shaping, transforming and even distorting us, the conditions of our lives and our future.

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