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1.

As a historian of art and an aesthetician, I was not previously concerned with landscape, nor had I employed that notion, even if it pertained to related issues, such as art in public spaces or the perception of architecture. However, considering the reasons behind that “shortage”, I would say that apart from the particular scope of my interests, in which text or substance of a work itself play a pivotal role, and which focus on the philosophy of art or specific art phenomena and their interpretations, the very semantics of the concept of landscape was a crucial factor, given that 1) it is a concept always denoting a certain broader whole, natural or cultural, which presupposes a holistic approach and thus sometimes involves the risk of excessive use of metaphor and a certain nebulousness; 2) it is also a concept powerfully rooted in the tradition of 18th-century aesthetic thought, a fact which entails a singularly aesthetic view of (natural) surrounding as a “picture”—as a sight which is subjectively “framed”, picturesque, beautiful or sublime. Nonetheless, I am of the opinion that this peculiar delineation and aesthetic provenance of the notion of landscape are no obstacles which would prevent it from becoming a scientifically useful research notion. “Landscape” in the sense of natural environment which in the course of history has been transformed through human intervention, as well as “urban landscape” as space of experience filled with cultural and temporal depositions, shaped at various levels (both deliberately and in a planned fashion as well as by random factors and spontaneous action) can and most certainly should be an object of in-depth analyses. Aesthetics, as a reflection of experience, aesthetic perception, aesthetic expectations and valuation, may offer substantial contributions to such studies.

2.

More than any other subject, landscape studies appear to be located at the boundaries, contiguous with a variety of domains of knowledge. This is due to the fact that human and non-human factors become continually superimposed in the formation of the entireties referred to as landscape; natural, physical and biological factors combine here with social and cultural factors. Although a thorough apprehension

of that nexus requires a revision of certain notions and approaches which are typical of the humanities (admittedly, a number of such re-valuations have already been announced and effected, including the recognition of the “agency of things”, the postulates of new materialism etc.) the viewpoint of the latter should remain a key aspect of studies concerned with landscape. First of all, this is because a perspective embracing the relationship between the naturally and artificially formed environment and the human recipient is essentially inscribed in the concept of landscape. Secondly, the shape and transformations of landscape (including natural landscapes) is always the upshot of historical, social, and technological circumstances; a landscape remains a singular “cultural text” to be read (and where the expertise of a historian, archaeologist, historical sociologist and ethnologist may prove advantageous). The third reason is that the surrounding space (landscape) exerts a mental effect on us; it forms habits, favours (or discourages) human aspirations for a “better life”. The humanities, including aesthetics, possess the conceptual instruments to investigate social conceptions and preferences regarding the quality of landscape, to determine how local communities perceive and attribute value to their surroundings, how varied interference with the existing landscape is received. Here, the role that the humanities may play goes beyond the description of reality, as their task is to develop awareness of one’s spatial milieu, its aesthetic aspects and the complex, multi-layered structure associated with it. The humanities have no doubt that privilege of being able to enrich our perception of landscape with historical and cultural comprehension of its manifold inner stratification (with both explicit and concealed layers), with reflection on the aesthetic and cultural motives behind particular ways of shaping the landscape. In consequence, one is made sensitive to what is culturally valuable and worth sustaining in landscape itself (and not only individual “features”).

3.

In line with the above, I believe that landscape studies requires an interdisciplinary approach; this is also where the promise and at the same time the difficulties lie, since individual disciplines often define “the same” object differently. Constructing a comprehensive conception of landscape—because only this kind of conception is truly efficacious—demands cooperation and exchange between the social sciences and the humanities, as well as competence in technical sciences relating to spatial planning and disciplines studying natural processes and determinants which intertwine with human activity. For instance, it would be highly advisable to integrate knowledge yielded by natural inquiry (biology, botany) with historical, ethnographic or archaeological research with respect to the culture of cultivation which developed in a given geographical area (a combination which incidentally already functions as ethnobotany). Similar collaborations might be

helpful in resolving current issues in a manner which considers long-term human impact on the transformation of the natural environment.

4.

This issue may be approached from a number of angles. There is certainly considerable value in scientific collaboration and interdisciplinary education at a university level which would support more socially sensitive and ecologically aware approaches to spatial planning, offering a potential alternative to technocratic, administratively-oriented management where current policies and economic considerations—and often sheer accident—are the decisive factors. It is not unlikely that this kind of integrated, interdisciplinary education may inspire technological and spatial innovations, while the obtained knowledge would support the implementation of pro-ecological, pro-social and economically sound solutions. Genuine interdisciplinarity is a vital element here—and by “interdisciplinary” I mean the utilization of expert competences of various detailed sciences to create a platform for subsequent exchange (which would not undermine the distinct foundations and knowledge developed within particular disciplines). Furthermore, research and curricula of this kind should centre around a body of issues relating to the immediate, surrounding landscape, its re-valuation, revitalization etc., while specific questions regarding those issues would provide a continuously expanding comparative resource.