



# POLISH JOURNAL OF LANDSCAPE STUDIES

nr 4—5/2019

ISSN 2657-327X  
DOI 10.14746/pls



Publikacja wydana ze środków grantu  
0059/NPRH4/H2b/83/2016

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Instytut Kultury Europejskiej Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza  
Instytut Filozofii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego

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4–5/2019

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# Landscape and the environment

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## Abstract

The paper analyzes the concept of landscape and its various embodiments in art and nature. On the one hand, one can claim that our understanding of the landscape is constituted by conceptual oppositions like human/non-human, artifactual/natural, culture/nature; on the other, one may notice that landscapes occur in the space “between” these oppositions. Furthering this observation, I lodge an objection to the approach of certain exponents of environmental aesthetics who opt for replacing the notion of landscape by that of environment because I would argue that the former is still informative.

## Keywords:

Aesthetics, art, environment, landscape

## 1. From nature as nature to nature as culture

Although we distinguish various kinds of landscape like, for instance, industrial landscape or urban landscape, in general human understanding, landscape is, first of all, a natural landscape, a fragment of nature understood as free from any presence, interference, or control on the part of man. Thus, we have to do with the first conceptual opposition of what is human and what is non-human. The sphere of what is human comprises man himself and all his products, while within the non-human sphere we find inanimate matter, plants, and animals. The objects produced by representatives of nature, like birds’ nests, animals’ burrows, or beavers’ dams also belong to the non-human sphere.

Let us start, then, with the concept of “nature as nature.” In the recent years it has frequently been written that nature as nature does not exist, that it has never existed, and that this concept has no counterpart as regards our everyday experience. In other words, the concept of nature as nature is a product of culture and occurs only as its opposite. Therefore, the concept of nature as nature assumes the

existence of culture. It can be said that nature as nature is the product of a mind that is used to thinking in the categories of opposition.

So, nature as nature exists rather in our minds, in our imagination, and it is usually highly appreciated. The concepts that are the closest to it include wilderness, innocence, and purity—emphasizing the state of being immaculate, uncultivated, untouched by man. And although the word wilderness originated from the word “wild,” which is associated with an uncomfortable sense of danger, in modern times it is its positive aspect that is recognized first and foremost; the untouched quality and innocence of nature as nature is emphasized. Undoubtedly, we need this concept since, having no counterpart in the actual world, it satisfies our vital need: the longing for something primal and intact. This need is so strong that the natural landscape is for us a part of nature as nature, which we long for to such an extent that—eagerly accepting the illusion—we ignore the traces of human activity that are present in the landscape.

As has been said, we humans don't have a firm and direct grasp on nature as nature. If we wanted to find it, we would be seeking it in vain in a landscape painting, where the presented landscapes almost always include elements of human activity. I would like to illustrate this with a few pictures, starting with the painting *The Clouds* by John Constable. This picture seems to represent nature as nature—even more so given that it concerns a part of the world that is hardly attainable for man. Obviously, we have to do with a painter's work, and, as we know, even in mimetic art the artists have an unlimited potential for creating the shapes of the reality they represent. In this case, however, art historians who study the series of Constable's drawings of clouds almost univocally emphasize that in this painting the artist consciously restricted his invention, and his intention was not to create a subjective image but rather to represent a view of clouds. The word “view” assumes here its fundamental meaning.

We can agree that in the image of the clouds themselves we do not find human presence; nevertheless, it can be found beyond the picture: that of the viewer (both the artist and the recipient) without whom those clouds would not be a view, and therefore they would not constitute a landscape either. The concept of a landscape includes the viewer. The landscape is not a self-contained entity; it exists with reference to that viewer. This is true for both painted landscapes and actual ones. It is important to emphasize that the viewer, constituting a condition of the landscape, is never within it; he is always without, at some distance. The landscape is given for the eye, and the eye belongs to our sense of distance. Thus, we view an actual landscape in a way similar to that in which we view a painted one.

The eye does not modify the landscape and yet the landscape exists only in so far as it is given to the eye. This is why even in the case of a cloudy sky, the presence of a viewer implies that we are not being presented with nature as nature. The human pervades the non-human; we are in the human world, in the anthroposphere

in which there is no room for the opposition of culture and nature in the strong sense, and nature as nature proves to be merely a projection of an ideal paradise as the primordial state with an air of nostalgia.

If we agree that nature as nature exists only as a notion, the landscapes that are called natural are, in fact, artifactual. We commonly encounter situations in which human artifacts produced for various reasons fill the world. So, now we shall replace the opposition of human/non-human with another one: artificial/natural. The constant process of filling the world with artifacts and of introducing them into the sphere described as nature (that which has been given) assumes different dimensions: from a simple addition of products, as it were, placing them in the surroundings, to the forms of advanced reshaping of that which is natural. Here I have in mind actions like marking out and maintaining mountain paths and trails, constructing power lines and networks, cable-cars, and buildings, cutting down trees or their branches, regulating rivers, creating gardens and parks, and, finally, intentionally reshaping whole landscapes. In the opposition of artificial/natural, whatever is natural is still highly appreciated while the artificial, especially if it refers to the so-called ordinary artifacts produced to satisfy practical needs, is treated with much less fondness.

As regards landscape painting, there are numerous pictures in which artifactual elements and natural ones are intertwined and merged, constituting a complex whole. The relations between artifacts and nature in landscape space are either specifically balanced or one of the factors dominates. In Constable's *A Mill at Gallingham in Dorset* we are presented with a balance. Moreover, while Gustave Eiffel's viaduct is perceived as a distinct intervention in the natural landscape, the old water mill that now belongs to the past assumes a value closer to that which we ascribe to nature itself and is treated with sentiment. In the case of Eiffel's work, we sense a strong contrast between nature and technology; in Constable's painting, the water mill, powered by an element of nature, remains in harmony with it. On the other hand, in another painting of the English landscapist, *Dedham Lock and Mill*, human artifacts present in the picture are clearly dominant, pushing nature—water, grass, and animals—to the margin; it is only the two larger trees on the right hand side that attract the viewer's attention.

So far, I have tried to show artifactual landscapes devoid of human figures. It is not easy to find such pictures among landscapes—artifacts are usually accompanied by people.

Humans are included in the landscape just like artifacts. They form a part of it—doing their jobs or relaxing. We can easily say that for them the landscape does not exist; they do not notice it since they are preoccupied with their activities. A landscape, no matter whether it is painted or real, exists in the eyes of the viewer, for the observer who is beyond the landscape, being neither its participant nor its part.

The landscape comprising elements of nature, artifacts, and people busy with various forms of activity is the landscape we encounter in our experiences. It should be noted that many objects produced by men assume meanings that go far beyond their practical function. They assume symbolic, religious, historical, aesthetic, or social dimensions, and the nature accompanying them, included in the new connotational field, is “nature as culture.” The landscape becomes a cultural landscape in which the opposition of culture/nature finds itself groundless.

I introduced the ideas of the natural landscape, the artifactual landscape, and the cultural landscape emphasizing the different grades of human presence in each of them. I also tried to prove that the basis of our understanding of the landscape is constituted by conceptual oppositions like human/non-human, artifactual/natural, culture/nature. However, landscapes occur rather in the space “between” these oppositions.

The oak tree called Bartek is the largest and one of the oldest trees found in Poland. It is now 30 m tall; it has a trunk with a girth of 9.85 m as well as a crown that spreads about 40 m. It is hard to say how old the tree is: scientists claim it is about 650 years old while tradition suggests it is 1200 years old. The hollow fragments of its trunk have been filled with concrete; its branches have received telescopic supports, and a lightning protection system has been installed. Despite the rot infested trunk, Bartek is still a living tree. It can be situated in the space “between” nature and culture.

In order to say goodbye to the 19th century and welcome the 20th, some Christian countries initiated special initiatives. Among others, in 1901 in Poland, a huge cross—15 m tall and 5.5 m wide—was constructed on top of Mt. Giewont (1875 m). Seen from afar, it is not particularly large, especially as compared to the huge mountain massif. However, it dominates due to its religious, symbolic meaning. In the landscape, the artifactual element and nature seem to belong to two totally independent orders. And yet, they interact—the cross attracts thunderbolts which, during the past 110 years, have significantly weakened its structure.

## 2. Landscape and senses

I have already stated that the landscape is given for the eye. Dictionaries define landscape as an expanse of scenery that can be seen in a single view or an extensive area of land regarded as being visually distinct. This is why landscape painting has come into being; painting is an art for viewing, and that is why we look at real landscapes in the way we have learnt while dealing with paintings. And although the landscape is sensually rich, the contribution of the remaining senses in perception is significantly diminished by the dominance of vision. That is doubly so given that the distance involved in the concept of visual perception grows enormously in the case of a landscape, for it encompasses an extensive view. Obviously,

in this situation the “contact” senses, which require closeness, cannot be fully engaged.

Activation of the contact senses requires participation. Yet, is it possible to participate in a landscape? We have seen people represented in the landscapes by John Constable, who undoubtedly receive a whole range of sense perceptions, particularly tactile ones, but, at the same time, their sight is limited to a very small area. They do not see the landscape. It seems that for the participant of a landscape, the landscape disappears—being replaced by the environment. Here we can indicate swimming as an example of man’s utmost submergence into the environment. This example allows us to realize that the landscape of a river, a lake, or a sea shore is given only to the person who is looking at it from afar. If he decides to take a plunge, that is, to destroy the distance, we can no longer speak of a landscape; rather, we are then dealing with environmental relations based on closeness. It is as if our senses of distance and those of contact cannot cooperate in harmony at their full capacity: when the eye dominates, the sense of touch is inhibited, and when touch takes over, the range of sight is reduced to the touched area.

Is, therefore, the landscape totally a product of visual culture, and does it exist only when it is watched? It might seem that the doubts which have been raised here will disappear when we use an urban landscape as an example. Obviously, we can watch a city from a distant hill or the highest floor of a skyscraper. However, when we speak of the urban landscape, we have in mind not its view from afar, but rather the network of its characteristic interrelations inasmuch as they are different from the suburban or farmland networks. In the former case, we really watch the landscape, remaining beyond it. In the latter case, we are included in the network of urban interrelations. Should we, therefore, speak of a landscape or rather of a city environment? Both of these words—landscape and environment—have something in common: they signify people’s surroundings. For this reason, fairly inconspicuously, they overlap and have started being used interchangeably as synonyms. This, however, means that they lose their specific meaning. In the case of a landscape the surroundings are watched from a distance, while in the case of the environment the surroundings include the watcher themselves—they are so close that interaction is unavoidable.

### 3. Aesthetic character of the landscape

The aesthetic element seems to be essential for the landscape—we admire its beauty. Observing a landscape like a painting is completely situated in modern aesthetics, based on the autonomy of the object and disinterestedness of perception as the conditions of experiencing beauty. When we pass from the concept of landscape to the concept of environment, from the viewer to the participant, the aesthetic quality—though still important—assumes another meaning, closer to its etymology

connected with *aisthesis*. In both cases the aesthetic quality means experiencing pleasure, but the focus is shifted. In the sense connected with disinterested perception, the pleasure comes from the contemplative (distanced) savoring of the object, while in the latter case the pleasure is generated by the interaction engaging all of one's senses, which is inevitable when immersed in an environment. The metaphor of the eye fully reflects the former kind of aesthetic quality, but to reflect the latter one it would be better to use the metaphor of touch—the only reciprocal sense, to touch means to be touched.

Here we should introduce the concept of experience in the broad sense, which follows from pragmatic aesthetics based on the philosophy of John Dewey. He understood experience as fully sensual and somatic, as an interaction between an organism and its environment, and it was not by chance that he used the very notion “environment,” which became a term, a concept in philosophy much later, thanks to ecology. In experience understood in this way, the aesthetic, as a quality of every experience, is not in opposition to the practical. We experience the environment in its mutually complementary aspects.

Arnold Berleant distinguished three models of experience: contemplative, characteristic for modern aesthetics, active (Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, Bollnow), engaging the subject, and participative, based on an interaction between the subject incarnate and the environment.<sup>1</sup> Participative experience became the principal concept of the environmental aesthetics developed by Berleant, which was better adjusted for our time than the traditional aesthetics developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

For us, it is important that Berleant tries to expand participative experience to include experience of the landscape as well. He admits that in landscape painting “the observer is removed from the scene and contemplates it from a distance,” and that “such paintings illustrate the usual definition of landscape as ‘a picture representing a section of natural, inland scenery’ that reflects the conception of landscape as ‘an expanse of natural scenery seen by the eye in one view’” (Berleant 2005, 5). Still, he finds it possible to revise this conception of landscape through a re-interpretation of landscape painting executed in the spirit of participative experience. He gives several arguments indicating that numerous works of this genre of painting “draw the viewer into the space as an invitation to visit,” “incorporate the perceiver into their space, compelling involvement,” “serve as an invitation, leading the viewer to enter the pictorial space,” “through the effective use of pictorial qualities a painting crates the total sensory field of experience” (Berleant 2005, 10-11).<sup>2</sup>

This is just a fragment of an admittedly fairly convincing argument. Nevertheless, I think that attributing a power of turning a recipient into a participant to the painting is possible only in the language of metaphor. An invitation to take part is not

<sup>1</sup> In my opinion, Dewey's conception of experience fully characterizes Berleant's participative model, for the description of which Deweyan terms like interaction, energy field, organism, environment, etc., were applied.

<sup>2</sup> This conception appeared in Berleant's early works, particularly in *Art and Engagement* (1991).

participation. Pictorial means of expression may evoke the impression of somatic and multi-sensual participation in a viewer only through mediation, which we do not encounter in a participative experience of the environment.<sup>3</sup> Berleant does not introduce a terminological difference between the landscape and the environment.<sup>4</sup> I believe, however, that it is worth maintaining this difference.

I am aware that my position may seem outdated and, maybe, too straightforward as compared with the—two decades old—advanced and sophisticated reflection over the landscape. It is, as it were, a step backwards. For much has been done to change our attitudes towards the landscape as a view examined as if it were a painting—passively and disinterestedly, from a remote, static observation point. But if we endow the landscape with the features that have been worked out by ecology, eco-philosophy, and environmental aesthetics in reference to the environment—features like interactivity, reciprocity, somatic and multi-sensual involvement—what will remain as the difference between a landscape and an environment? And if we treat these two concepts as synonyms, what will happen to the whole semantic load of the landscape as developed within modern aesthetics? It would be neither easy nor useful to get rid of it. The two meanings of the landscape, the older one as a view perceived by sight and the newer one as an engaging interaction, cannot be united, harmonized, and synthesized. If it were possible, the synthesis could constitute the essential difference between the category of landscape and that of environment. However, that is not the case; the new meaning abolishes the old one, replacing it outright.

It is better to preserve the concept of landscape in its historical, semantic shape, and the new meaning ascribed to it should be left where it emerged, that is, in reference to the environment. We need both of these concepts in their clear semantic distinction. That being said, I would prefer to leave the issue open. Hence, I will conclude my considerations with a few questions.

#### 4. Twilight of the landscape?

It seems that the categories of landscape and environment are neither synonymous nor even complementary. Will the potential of the landscape run out with

3 Martin Seel, writing on aesthetic perception with reference to the history of aesthetics from Alexander Baumgarten to Theodor W. Adorno, claims that aesthetic perception consists in synesthesia; it differs from other forms of perception through special connection of all the senses. There are no aesthetic experiences limited to only one sense. Seel admits, however, that when we, for example, see an object, the other senses accompany or penetrate the sight as the projects of imagination (*Vorstellungen*) (Seel, 2000).

4 Like many other representatives of environmental aesthetics, J. Douglas Porteous perceives the need to distinguish “urban” and “nonurban” areas—landscapes and townscapes. Claiming that the “environment is the stage on which human activity is set” (Porteous 1996, 192), he uses the concept of environment interchangeably with the two kinds of “scapes.” However, in my opinion, man’s activity and his relation to the landscape on the one hand and the environment on the other hand are fundamentally different.

the twilight of visual culture? The issue is not the fact that people will cease to admire views, but the theoretical capacity of the category of landscape. At present aesthetics is executing a radical transformation and primary importance is being assumed by categories like interaction instead of contemplation, participation instead of observation, involvement instead of passivity, multi-sensory character emphasizing touch instead of visibility, immediateness (immersion) in place of distance. Will these new categories allow us to preserve the concept of landscape? Will they emphasize those properties of the landscape that have gone unnoticed so far? Will attributing features characteristic of environment to the landscape not turn it into a redundant category?

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# A landscape embroiled: Experience of nature through experience of art<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

The article sets out with the theory of “aesthetics of reality” (created by Maria Gołaszewska) and its related method of transferring artistic structures onto non-artistic reality. The resulting construct, which is dubbed a para-artistic structure, becomes the theoretical basis for the aesthetic experience of nature. The so-called “formalization”—a procedure which consists in inserting nature into artistic frameworks—makes natural phenomena acquire a pretense of artwork. Nature as a picture becomes a landscape, while terms connected with the aesthetics of nature gain artistic qualities, enabling use of such notions as picturesque or kitsch. The methodological proposal by Gołaszewska is subsequently compared with the critical perspective of environmental aesthetics.

## Key words:

art, environmental aesthetics, landscape, structuralism

## 1.

*A sunset is an intellectual phenomenon*

(Pessoa 2017, 121)

Had the beauty of London fog existed before William Turner?<sup>2</sup> From the standpoint of the structuralistically oriented aesthetics of reality by Maria Gołaszewska,

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1 This article is an extended version of part of the following text: Paula Milczarczyk, “Estetyka codzienności. O relacji między sztuką a rzeczywistością pozaartystyczną,” in *Mélos — τεκτονική — εἰκασία. Mit jedności sztuk czy prawda wyobraźni? Architektura, muzyka i sztuki plastyczne jako sztuki siostrzane*, eds. Ryszard Kasperowicz and Aleksandra Skrabek. Lublin: Galeria Labirynt i Autorzy, 2018, 113-27.

2 The anecdote according to which it was Turner who “taught” the English to notice the beauty of London fog fueled the so-called Oscar Wilde paradox, which may be encapsulated in his “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.” The question of how deeply our experience of the beauty of nature is conditioned by works of art is elaborated on by Wilde in the essay entitled *The Decay of Lying* (2000): “Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we

a work of art (including its immanent cognitive schema) provides ready-made patterns of perceiving extra-artistic reality, and thus plays a substantial role in the process of approaching nature in the aesthetic dimension. Gołaszewska's conception is founded on the premise that two domains—the world of art and the extra-artistic world—overlap and create a shared realm which, embedded in the framework of structural community, generates a new quality (the intellectual construct emerging as a result is referred to by the philosopher as a para-artistic structure). Gołaszewska justifies the structural approach by finding that “it is in the structures of objects and phenomena that one can and should seek the most significant, relevant differences and similarities between art and those objects, events and phenomena which by definition do not belong to art but do possess aesthetic qualities. ... At any rate, structure provides us with a basic category because, as it seems, taking into account the internal relationships between elements distinguished within an entire system permits the most thorough elucidation concerning the aesthetic value of extra-artistic facts” (Gołaszewska 1984a, 80).

Gołaszewska's “aesthetics of reality” may be described as a theory of art discovered in the world which applies when the artistic is chanced upon in the extra-artistic sphere of reality, in other words, when “an object is extrapolated from the everyday world, segregated, and framed. ... Art is claimed where none was intended. ... What found art does do is center our attention on an object or event in a way that resembles the intense focus we give to things designated as art by an artist, an institution, or the art world” (Berleant 2010, 179).<sup>3</sup>

Drawing on the paradigm of the so-called aesthetic situationism conceived by Gołaszewska, one could classify that type of experience as an “incomplete aesthetic situation”: when a creation exists but the creator cannot be identified, and thus, when that quasi-artistic dimension which is intellectually extracted from the structure of an object (or broadly: fact) has not been consciously planned or designed by anyone. It may be said that in the structure of the phenomenon discussed by the philosopher, the “creative” and the entitative aspect overlap, while the prime case in point is the beauty of natural forms, concerning which Roger Caillois (1963) observes—in the context of his theory of generalized aesthetics—that the origin of this kind of form is properly assigned to *chance*, even though such forms owe their appearance to a welter of determining causes. At the same time, he believes that the welter that determines things from the very outset is thoroughly random. Thus,

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see it, depends on the arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art had invented them” (233).

3 This is how Arnold Berleant characterizes the transformation of a random object into an artistic *objet trouvé*. In that fragment, one should pay particular attention to the motif of the so-called “framing” of extra-artistic reality, which is also encountered in Gołaszewska, especially in the context of the aesthetic experience of landscape.

he claims that forms born of life have not been created by anyone, and they seem to be their own sculptor.<sup>4</sup> Gołaszewska's approach also operates under the assumption that by seeking and revealing something else in an object than the object itself, we arrive at a peculiar "surplus of meaning" which causes reality to cease being a purely physical entity in our eyes, and becomes "meaningful."<sup>5</sup> To Nicolai Hartman, that type of aesthetic experience (including the experience of landscape) constitutes a "second-order seeing" which is enacted when the other becomes active; the first is directed upon what is really present to the senses, the second upon this other thing, which exists only "for" us, the observers. For Hartman, this other thing is not projected into the first randomly, rather it is clearly dependent upon what is seen (Hartmann 1985).<sup>6</sup> According to Gołaszewska, that "additional meaning" is revealed when a sensorially given, extra-artistic object (fact) is subjected to the intellectual procedure of artistic structuration—that is, undergoes formalization by being enclosed within frames, or a network of art-related notions are imposed on it.<sup>7</sup> It is thus a singular case "when artistic structures (created as part of artistic activity) are transferred onto actual reality and prove applicable to that reality. In such instances, we may speak of para-artistic structures, because no artistic object nor a work of art is produced at the time, but the existing objects are treated in the manner of artworks" (Gołaszewska 1984a, 82). Significantly enough, those structures should be seen solely in analogy to the arrangements occurring in art (hence the prefix "para" which the philosopher consistently employs), as due to the procedure an extra-artistic object (fact)—as she often stresses—only resembles a work of art "when reality is inscribed into artistic (i.e., para-artistic) structures, the object continues to be what it is: an object of the real world; it does not become an artwork *exclusively*. The only thing that changes is the perspective from which it is approached, followed by a shift of the mode of its belonging to the human world" (Gołaszewska 1984a, 90; emphasis added).

4 In this context, one begins to see a deeper sense in the title of the first photo book published in the mid-19th century, Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature*, echoing a concept of nature which "draws itself." See Macnaghten and Urry (1998).

5 "Nature starts becoming an aesthetic object in our eyes only when we approach it as meaningful, when we impart a sense to it, when it affects us as if it harboured more than the purely physical existence would suggest" (Gołaszewska 1984b, 110).

6 A similar approach is suggested by Adorno (2004, 92): "What is beautiful in nature is what appears to be more than what is literally there."

7 That singular "artistic seeing" of reality is something artists fairly often admit to. In this respect, see the interesting study on *Dzienniki (Diaries)* by Maria Dąbrowska, where we read that "on several occasions in *Dzienniki*, one encounters notes stating explicitly that their author views external reality as ready-made visual compositions ... : 'ruins seen through the window look like a futurist's landscape,' 'the beautiful village of Hel, as if cut out from an old Dutch painting,' 'entering the tremendous forest, with trees from Andriolli's etchings,' 'the yard and the house—like the mood in Linke's painting, laced with Goya'" (Bieńkowska and Umińska-Tytoń 2016, 45).

Consequently, the presumed structural community of both those realms (the artistic and the extra-artistic worlds) by no means makes them identical.<sup>8</sup> The construct described by Gołaszewska—the para-artistic structure—is therefore a practical notional tool serving to describe a phenomenon which could be labelled an epistemological “by-product” of the mimetically oriented artistic practice because, as it turns out, the extra-artistic reality, subjected to fragmentation, formalized and enclosed “within the frames” of art, subsequently begins to function (in that formalized shape) as a pattern of perceiving reality.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, when contemplating a wide expanse of landscape, for instance, one unwittingly looks for structures known from painterly compositions (hence the Polish adjective *malowniczy* derived from the verb *malować*—to paint, and the 18<sup>th</sup>-century category of the picturesque). The dependencies between art and reality prove to be reciprocal (in other words, interdependencies are at play); therefore, “since the earliest periods art has conceptualized in twofold fashion: as a technical dexterity and as a means of mirroring the world. The view that art imitates nature was contrasted with the view that ‘nature imitates art,’ meaning that it was only thanks to the emergence of specific structures and values in art ... that the human is capable of discerning those qualities and structures in nature” (Gołaszewska 1984b, 12).

In the context of his aesthetic theory of imagination, Joseph Addison (1712) went as far as making the paradoxical claim that “we find the Works of Nature still more pleasant, the more they resemble those of Art” (Addison 1712, 189).<sup>10</sup>

## 2.

*The pure mornings and the gentle, mist-filled sunsets  
stirred in me the contempt I have for kitsch*

(Hłasko 1957, 9)

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century aphorism of “nature imitating art” has its philosophical underpinning in the idealistic aesthetic reflection of G. W. F. Hegel. In fact, Hegelian thought brings an end to the grand tradition in which the beauty of nature was a paragon for the beauty of art, while the latter was merely an act of imitating

<sup>8</sup> Here, the extra-artistic world is not construed along the romantic lines of a “total work of art,” as from the standpoint of logic that would be a categorial error consisting in a confusion of two separate ontological categories. Moreover, Gołaszewska’s model does not bear traits of panaestheticism, because the approach she describes does not rely on an absolute and permanent perception of the world in the aesthetic manner but merely on constant readiness to adopt such an attitude.

<sup>9</sup> According to Derek Gregory, the mechanism of pictorial fragmentation of the world is rooted in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century concept of “world-as-exhibition” which, following the establishment of geography as a scientific discipline, yielded a new type of visualization of reality (“picturing the world”). See Macnaghten and Urry (1998, 121).

<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Addison (1712) underlines that “if we consider the Works of Nature and Art, as they are qualified to entertain the Imagination, we shall find the last very defective, in Comparison of the former; for though they may sometimes appear as Beautiful or Strange, they can have nothing in them of that Vastness and Immensity” (189).

that unsurpassable ideal. The conceptions of the German philosopher inaugurate an approach which presumes that the beauty of nature does not exist in itself (unfolding only in the form of artistic representation); as a result, the “aesthetics of nature” is exposed as a peculiar hoax (Morawski 1985, 202). A painterly landscape, Hegel (2010, 29) writes, “this work of the spirit acquires a higher rank than the mere natural landscape. For everything spiritual is better than any product of nature.”<sup>11</sup> Hegel’s view of the relationship linking those two spheres of reality is resumed in the aesthetic deliberations of Stefan Morawski. Dividing values into aesthetic (a narrow field of values associated with contact with nature) and artistic ones (a broad field of experiencing art), Morawski saw the “falsity” of pre-Hegelian premises of aesthetics in the error of identifying the sources of values with their measure (Morawski 1985, 203). Based on a theory of phases of aesthetic experience, Morawski concluded that nature is revealed as an aesthetic object only when it is subjected to a process of “culturation” (Morawski 1985, 201).<sup>12</sup> Thus, exposure to artworks not only determines the mode in which the beauty of nature is experienced, but also enables the experience of aesthetically valent qualities in nature in general. The relationship between nature and the artwork which imitates it was conceived in even more radical terms—as a relation that betrayed traits of violence—by Theodor W. Adorno (2004, 81), according to whom “[the] concept of natural beauty rubs on a wound, and little is needed to prompt one to associate this wound with the violence that the artwork—a pure artifact—inflicts on nature.”<sup>13</sup> The very proclivity for aestheticization of nature (its apprehension as an aesthetic object) should be associated with the desire for its subjugation (“social mutilation”), while the tools enabling the human to dominate nature are to be sought in Adorno’s opinion on the visual faculty: “The ‘How beautiful!’ at the sight of a landscape insults its mute language and reduces its beauty; appearing nature wants silence” (Adorno 2004, 90). As Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska notes, the violence here results from the very process of objectivization from the attempt to embed it into a form; on the other hand, the act of mimetic iteration might also possess a liberating potential (Rejniak-Majewska 2014, 57).<sup>14</sup> In special instances, a “happy

11 Hegel’s idealistic views not only went against romantic aesthetics but, above all, opposed the premises of the 18th-century empirical aesthetics championed by David Hume and Anthony A. Shaftsbury, among others (Frydryczak 2008-2009, 44).

12 Drawing on the findings of Joachim Ritter, Beata Frydryczak (2008-2009, 49) observes that the notion of landscape itself is an invention of the modern era: the nature that philosophy and science approached in notional terms was supplanted by the eye-witnessed landscape (seen via a “panoramic view”), which made it possible to include nature in the scope of aesthetic questions.

13 Adorno’s approach is corroborated by cultural critic Camille Paglia, who finds that “there is, I must insist, nothing beautiful in nature. Nature is a primal power, coarse and turbulent. Beauty is our weapon against nature” (Quoted in Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 113).

14 In its superior-quality output, art “constitutes violence” but also manages to “neutralize” it; also, it comes closer to nature thanks to contemplative thought, where it negates the imposed ascendancy of the human over nature (Rejniak-Majewska 2014, 57-59).

reconciliation” may ensue, momentary though it is. As an example, Adorno cites Corot’s painting (Adorno 2004, 88).

The process of “culturation” of the experience of nature, which manifests, for instance, in the human penchant for approaching nature in a manner one approaches a work of art (the mechanism of plotting artistic structures over extra-artistic reality, described by Gołaszewska) seems to be reaching its termination. The shift, whose origins should be traced back to the Adornoian postulation for a return to the beauty of nature that was not mediated by art, may be described as augmented aesthetics, one which transcends the narrow approach that held sway since Hegel and confined the scope of aesthetics to the work of art.<sup>15</sup> The conviction that reality harbors a much broader aesthetic potential than artistic beauty is reflected in such discourses as aesthetics of everyday life, soma-aesthetics, and eco-aesthetics. Based on vindication of the mundane experience (and change of approach to experience as such) or greater emphasis on the so-called inferior senses (touch, smell, taste) in everyday life, contemporary aesthetic thought empowers a broad approach to the phenomenon of aestheticity, by virtue of which the term can be applied to various manifestations of reality.<sup>16</sup> In the wake of those transformations, the aesthetic study of nature obtains a new form, with eco- or environmental aesthetics becoming ever more widespread paradigms. The new perspective in research radically rejects such notional categories as “formalization” and “enframing” with their associated mechanism of artwork-like perception of nature. Being based on extremely anthropocentric conceptions, they are considered instruments of oppressive fragmentation which inevitably leads to objectification of nature.<sup>17</sup> This entails the dangers of reductive approaches to nature which, erroneously, demote living nature to an immobile image, to pure visibility, an inanimate object, which Adorno had already commented on in his *Aesthetic Theory*. What is more, the approach permits use of contradictory terminologies with respect to nature, such as the notion of kitsch, which became so well-established in art theory.<sup>18</sup> In this context, Gołaszewska refers to the view of the Giewont mountain, “the mountains, looked at as a ‘beautiful landscape’ on the one hand, promptly become ‘kitschy’ or ‘boring’ (as it sometimes happens with the view of the Giewont seen

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15 As Gernot Böhme (2002) observes, in his “reclamation” of a broad scope of interest for aesthetics, Adorno still perpetuates the traditional divisions, where nature functions (in the bourgeois fashion) as a world apart. For Böhme, nature and the human make up an indivisible union fused by corporeality.

16 This evinces a return to the original, broad notion of aesthetics as a theory of sensory perception—as envisioned by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. The approach is advocated by, among others, Böhme (2002).

17 The phenomenon had manifested already in the 19th-century tourism-driven perception of nature as scenery (decoration), with the simultaneous inundation of painterly landscapes and postcards, which triggered the bourgeois idealization of nature. The latter continues today, with the substantial contribution of the mass media and tourist industry.

18 See Rogucki (2015). As for nature perceived in the categories of kitsch, Rogucki (2015, 10) makes an interesting observation: “The kitsch complication gives rise to a paradox which in a way seals its small victory: the kitsch claims to enact beauty, while an adherent of high art will respond by stating that beauty is tantamount to kitsch (or invariably leads to the latter).”

from Zakopane, because it is the most typical, weighs on the landscape, and on top of that has been banalized by the numerous photographs and souvenirs)” (Gołaszewska 1984b, 106).

Adorno (2004, 94) noted that “great paintings and picture-postcards have in common that they have put primeval images at our fingertips,” which is why “kitsch paintings have even infected sunsets.”

In perceiving nature broadly (as a phenomenon), contemporary approaches relinquish the traditional divisions into the internal and the external or the subjective and the objective, directing their attention primarily to the very phenomenon of experience which permeates those dichotomous divisions. One of the chief proponents of environmental aesthetics is Arnold Berleant, who, relying on the tenets of Deweyan pragmatism, brings the communal dimension of experience to the fore, highlighting that we are not distanced with respect to the object of cognition, but we are immersed with it in a shared context: the environment (Wilkoszewska 2006, 138). Consequently, as Krystyna Wilkoszewska notes, Berleant’s project may be described as aesthetics of involvement and participation, and, having such a form, it will be opposed to the post-Kantian aesthetics of distance and disinterestedness. From this perspective, the aesthetic experience of environment (understood as a network of relationships and links) is an integrated experience, engaging the spiritual and the corporal faculties of the human, who perceives themselves in a unity with what is experienced. The aesthetic experience regains its directness as the human ceases to resort to anchoring their experience in prefabricated schemata (such as the structure of artwork) because, as Böhme (2002) observes, this is what distinguishes aesthetics of nature from ecological aesthetics. As a result, nature as an aesthetic object is something which exists of itself, and moves one by virtue of its autonomous existence. Interestingly enough, a similar approach to nature (advancing a radical anti-aesthetic variant) had already been suggested in 1985 by Stefan Morawski, who wrote as follows: “If, in turn, delight is called forth by the luscious greenery of a meadow and the abundant colors of its flowers, by the serene blackness and thickness of a forest, enhanced by the song of birds and the glimpses of sky among the trees, the sudden encounter with an expanse of inky waters, with reflections of the rising or setting sun... are precisely a counter-artistic experience; a kind of polysensory fascination or authentic holidaying” (Morawski 1985, 204).

In what was a radical contradiction to Gołaszewska’s proposal, Morawski held that a genuine experience of nature can only take place when “there is no concentration of suitably selected qualities within a demarcated, artificially organized (framed) structure; the moment and its augmented sensations are not ‘arrested’ in order to set apart a picture, retouch it, and imitate a painterly piece, or stylize it in the manner of a postcard” (1985, 204).

According to Morawski's classification, the characteristic of the "fifth phase of aesthetic experience" is that "exposure to nature is no longer an act of viewing, contemplating, and savoring perfectly structured sensory qualities. The experience in which one then partakes is rather akin to swimming in a mountain lake, when the swimmer feels as if they were a fish" (1985, 206-7).<sup>19</sup>

### 3.

*"The landscape disturbs my thought," he said in a low voice. "It makes my reflections sway like suspension bridges in a furious current. It is beautiful and for this reason wants to be looked at."*

*I close my eyes and say: "You green mountain by the river, with your rocks rolling against the water, you are beautiful.*

*But it is not satisfied; it wants me to open my eyes to it."*

(Kafka, 2012)

The opposed proposals discussed above (the para-artistic perspective of Gołaszewska and the anti-anthropocentric environmental aesthetics) provoke one to reflect on the aesthetic experience of nature (landscape) and, even more so, on the human approach to nature in general. Addressing the issue which both of the positions represent leads directly to further questions concerning the fluidity of the boundaries between artistic and extra-artistic reality, the relationship which joins aesthetics with ethics, the shape which aesthetic education should adopt (education through aesthetics), as well as the democratization and elitization of aesthetic experience.<sup>20</sup> These questions have the potential to drive the reflection on, possibly resulting in a "middle-ground perspective" which would combine the two proposals. Therefore, I leave the question of whether landscape "wishes to be looked at" open.

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<sup>19</sup> It may be worthwhile to note that the "aquatic" metaphor underscoring the shared aspect of experience in which the dividing line between the subject and the object is blurred would recur almost 20 years later in an essay by Berleant (2005).

<sup>20</sup> Considering the two suggested approaches, it might seem the Gołaszewska's displays certain elitist traits, since the cultural competence of the viewer, including, for instance, knowledge of art history, is an inseparable element of the para-artistic structuration of nature. On the other hand, it may be noted that the "painterly" visions of nature are mass produced today chiefly by popular media—advertisement, the tourist industry, or design (gadgets). It would therefore seem that the experience of landscape that does not become entangled in structured visions of this kind is an elite experience.



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# To describe an alien planet: An experience of landscape in *The Voyage of the Beagle* by Charles Darwin

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## Abstract:

This text presents an attempt to reread Darwin's account of his journey on the Beagle. That account constitutes a report of meetings and confrontations with various "strangers": men, animals, as well as with different faces of otherness and exoticism, that culminate in a landscape so radically distinct from the European one, namely that of the South Pacific. This interpretation allows us to look at Darwin—the narrator—as more than just a naive traveler who observes and judges the world exclusively through the narrow perspective of British imperialism. The naturalist struggles with describing that which exceeds his previous experiences. The imperialistic perspective of landscape taken up in this text allows us to reflect on Darwin's perception of the landscape. The sights analyzed in the text are foremost treated as emanations of the powers of nature. At the same time, Darwin defines these sights in categories that are not scientific but aesthetic, finding them beautiful and sublime.

## Keywords:

landscape, Darwin, landscape experience, imperialistic landscape, nature

In the last chapter of *The Voyage of the Beagle*, Charles Darwin writes about the Brazilian landscape as follows: "The land is one great wild, untidy, luxuriant hot-house, made by Nature for herself, but taken possession of by man, who has studied it with gay houses and formal gardens. How great would be the desire in every admirer of nature to behold, if such were possible, the scenery of another planet, yet to every person in Europe, it may be truly said, that at the distance of only a few degrees from his native soil, the glories of another world are opened to him" (Darwin 2008, 720). Hence, the naturalist does not come back to England from a journey "around the world," but rather from an extraterrestrial one. Nature itself turns out to be "extraterrestrial"; it surprises him with its richness and exoticism.

Human activity, on the other hand, is much less interesting; it is ruled by an established pattern of ordering a given space—a wild area is transformed into a “formal garden.”

In the passages under consideration, Darwin refers to areas that appear to be unspoiled by humans and too “wild” to ever be developed by man. The presented sights are treated as emanations of the powers of nature. At the same time, Darwin defines these sights in categories that are not scientific but aesthetic, finding them beautiful and sublime. Unlike his descriptions of other phenomena encountered in the course of his journey, the descriptions of tropical scenery, the tropical rain forests in particular, are very emphatic. Insofar as he looks upon landscapes organized by man from an imperialistic perspective, noticing what suits and what does not suit a certain British cultural model, he finds it challenging to describe these pristine views.

How can one intelligibly describe a different planet, when its essence lies precisely in this distinctness that is impossible to translate into anything familiar?

W. J. T. Mitchell, in his now classic article “Imperial Landscape” (2002), puts forward the thesis that the landscape constitutes a medium—namely, it serves primarily to convey cultural meanings and values. A landscape can be described as attractive, beautiful, wild, etc., only in a specific context; there is nothing in the landscape that makes it inherently so. In other words, what we describe as “natural” also results from a given cultural context. According to Mitchell, the landscape mediates between what is cultural and what is natural: “[It] is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package” (Mitchell 2002, 5). Mitchell examines the relations between the landscape and imperialism; he shows, for example, how the British model of landscape was transferred to the territories conquered by the British Empire. In this sense the landscape becomes a tool of power and domination; it allows us to conceive of certain spaces (namely the South Pacific) as virginal, which can be described and ordered according to European standards. Mitchell writes: “The South Pacific provided, therefore, a kind of *tabula rasa* for the fantasies of European imperialism, a place where European landscape conventions could work themselves out virtually unimpeded by ‘native’ resistance, where the ‘naturalness’ of those conventions could find itself confirmed by a real place understood to be in a state of nature” (2002, 18).

Darwin’s text follows this pattern of narration when describing Tahiti and New Zealand among others. According to Mitchell’s work, he presents these lands as if they were incarnate “states of nature” while assessing if a given naturalness strives to a certain complex and primal harmony and beauty or, on the contrary, to a primal and primitive indolence.

Gillian Beer, in her article “Writing Darwin’s Islands” (1998), shows that *The Voyage* constitutes more than a testimony to a certain English, imperialistic perspective. In her interpretation, Darwin posits interesting shifts of scope between what is known (British) and what is unknown (alien). Beer focuses on his descriptions of the islands; she notices that in the second, revised, edition the naturalist pays more and more attention to describing the studied islands (among others, the Galapagos Archipelago). His conclusions regarding the geology of the islands are not limited exclusively to these unknown lands; after all, the basic Victorian narrative was grounded in England being an island. Beer argues against the thesis that can be found in the introduction to the abridged edition of *The Voyage*, written by Janet Browne and Michael Neve, who identify the cultural and political background of Darwin’s work insofar as he observed the world from a very specific British perspective. Beer, while not contradicting the generally constructed thesis that Darwin presents a culturally determined attitude, stresses the continuous dynamic of his position. She asserts that, “instead, he more and more looked back with exotic and awakened eyes on the taken-for-granted England from which he set out” (1998, 130). England loses its status as the mainland from where one sets off to conquer the world and where one then safely returns to. It becomes, instead, just one more area to be examined. Thus, Darwin’s perspective came to be marked in a sense, one could say “infected,” by the radical otherness with which he was confronted. Consequently, sensitive to the unfamiliarity of the scenery that surrounds man, he began to notice a spatial alienation of human beings, an alienation that constitutes a condition of the familiar order brought by culture.

Darwin explains and describes a world of various life forms by comparing the known and the unknown. Rather than looking only at one fraction of reality, he immediately puts it into a network of relations with other phenomena. As Beer writes, “that capacity imaginatively [*sic*] to *enjoy* difference proves to be Darwin’s central intellectual gift” (1998, 130). She goes on to suggest that this is the ability that allowed him to formulate his thesis on evolution and, one might add, to implement his travel experience in his scientific work. She endeavors to demonstrate the uniqueness of Darwin’s writing and attitude, which is of course conditioned by cultural and social context without, however, being completely determined by the two. Darwin is able to abandon his “English” point of view and look at England from a foreigner’s perspective; what is more, he can even study himself, just as he studies all the other objects of his observations. When confronted with an alien landscape, Darwin becomes “himself as another” (Ricoeur 1992).

The present article is an analysis of the report of landscape experience in Darwin’s *The Voyage of the Beagle*. The book constitutes a narrative report of the journey, in which Darwin took part as a naturalist employed on the HMS Beagle from 1833 to 1836, and which he himself considered to be the key event for his scientific discovery. It is not an exclusively scientific report; it is addressed to a wider audience as it

falls into the category of travel and life science literature. It can be read as a certain anthropological overview—records of meetings and confrontations with different “strangers”: people, animals, as well as various faces of otherness and exoticism—that emerge in this landscape which is so radically distinct from the European one. This interpretation allows us to look at Darwin—the narrator—as more than just a naive traveler who observes and judges the world exclusively through the narrow perspective of British imperialism. The naturalist struggles with describing that which exceeds his previous experiences. However, he is usually saved by the imperialistic narration that offers a convenient model for assessing the natives by comparing them to a certain British norm of being civilized. He may also turn to the discourse natural science and focus on an appropriate explanation of peculiar, at first glance, phenomena or on an appropriate classification of encountered exotic animals. Nevertheless, the problem of adequately describing a reality so radically exceeding everything that is known constantly resurfaces directly and indirectly in his prose. When experiencing an unknown space, he is confronted with the issue of otherness which lies in our gaze and language, which on the one hand should express it, and on the other hand, by representing it, also takes it over and domesticates it.

## Faces of otherness

It seems that there are two manifestations of otherness that prove particularly defiant. The first is the otherness of the native inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, whom Darwin calls *savages*, and the second is the landscape, which evokes a feeling of sublimity. At first glance, these two types of otherness, human and natural, demand different methods of interpretation and description; they put before Darwin the task of adequately reporting an experience that escapes all known categorization. The experience of the landscape’s sublimity and the shock of the *wild* cannot be adequately described. The narration can only point to certain phenomena, while the sense of the experience remains beyond the text.

In the last chapter of *The Voyage*, Darwin recaps his journey; first of all, he accentuates his own discoveries. Secondly, he provides the reader with a brief review of the advantages and disadvantages of such long journeys. After emphasizing all the inconveniences of sea expeditions (that are particularly unpleasant for those who suffer from seasickness, which, according to the author’s warning based on personal experience, is incurable), soothed solely by the vision of a long-awaited return to his beloved homeland, Darwin finally proceeds to why it is actually worth submitting oneself to this kind of suffering.

He lists the aesthetic pleasures related to admiring the landscapes and the sights so unlike those of Europe, as well as the opportunity to see with one’s own eyes

a most astonishing sight “the first sight in his native haunt of a barbarian—of man in his lowest and most savage state” (Darwin 2008, 730).

The savages, whose sight struck Darwin so, are borderline subjects. Their appearance, behavior, and customs are extremely uncivilized; they do not show any traces of the seemingly “natural” domination of man over the natural world. The Darwinian narration breaks down in the chapter about Tierra del Fuego, where he abandons the calm and paternalistic tone used to describe the population of South America in favor of a voice full of astonishment, horror, disgust, and confusion. The naturalist writes explicitly that the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego are “our” (“we” refers here to Europeans) brothers, our forefathers even, since it is likely that the ancestors of “civilized” man looked and behaved in this way. This rational conclusion, while being in accordance with the theory of natural selection being formulated, does not erase the shock caused by his encounter with these savages. It is real and, at the same time, almost impossible to accept. The savages cannot be classified as animals; they are people without a doubt, nevertheless they do not behave the way men should. They escape the “anthropological machine,” demanding a place outside the categories of “man” and “animal.” They function similarly to the primitive “Homo alalus,” distinguished by Giorgio Agamben, that, in 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse, acted as a necessary link between the animal and the human, mediating between areas of that which is human and non-human (Agamben 2004, 35). The savages of Tierra del Fuego are on the lowest level of human development. They lack animal instinct and cunning, as well as the culture-bound ability to bend the unfriendly natural world to their own will. Cannon Schmitt even puts forward the thesis that, within Darwinian theory, which consequently moves and blurs the border between what is human and what is animal, the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego were the last “real” men that in fact exceeded the natural order. As Schmitt writes, “necessarily existing at a point on that continuum, Fuegians are nonetheless also exiled from it. Neither human nor ‘animal’, too familiar to be ignored but too alien to be acknowledged kin ..., they stand alone” (Schmitt 2009, 56).

The inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego belong in the areas between culture and nature; they are humans and yet they do not resemble them. It is unclear what language to use to describe them. Darwin oscillates between a personal report of violent shock and a rational, evolutionary discourse that perceives them as surviving forms of man at a very early stage of development. Nature, which allows for the meeting of representatives of the same species at such radically different stages of development, as Darwin sees it, seems to reveal its contrariness: “I do not believe it is possible to describe or paint the difference between savage and civilized man” (Darwin 2008, 730).

## Sublimity: between experience and representation

For Darwin, the landscape likewise resists description even though it evokes completely different feelings—namely, those of intense pleasure and sublimity. The landscape is where the mysterious power of nature manifests itself. In his words, “among the scenes which are deeply impressed on my mind, none exceed in sublimity the primeval forests undefaced by the hand of man; whether those of Brazil, where the powers of Life are predominant, or those of Tierra del Fuego, where Death and Decay prevail. Both are temples filled with the varied productions of the God of Nature: — no one can stand in these solitudes unmoved, and not feel that there is more in man than the mere breath of his body” (Darwin 2008, 729). Darwin keeps emphasizing the feeling of sublimity and how moved he was in places that seem untouched. Sublimity can only be evoked by that which is entirely wild and natural. The question we are left with being who exactly Darwin considers to be the people whose presence meaningfully impacts natural areas. In the last chapter, he states that one of the most emotional moments that awaits the European traveler is the realization that he is the first civilized man to be there: “I do not doubt that every traveler must remember the glowing sense of happiness which he experienced, when he first breathed in a foreign clime, where the civilized man had seldom or never trod” (Darwin 2008, 731).

What is characteristic of his descriptions of exotic sublimity is their being compared to a sublimity comprehensible to a European. The rain forest is compared to “the theatre or the opera,” and while referring to his impressions of the expedition to the Cordillera, Darwin writes as follows: “When we reached the crest and looked backwards, a glorious view was presented. The atmosphere resplendently clear; the sky an intense blue; the profound valleys; the wild broken forms; the heaps of ruins, piled up during the lapse of ages; the bright-coloured rocks, contrasted with the quiet mountains of snow; all these together produced a scene no one could have imagined. Neither plant nor bird, excepting a few condors wheeling around the higher pinnacles, distracted my attention from the inanimate mass. I felt glad that I was alone: it was like watching a thunderstorm, or hearing in full orchestra a chorus of the Messiah» (Darwin 2008, 467).

Darwin was familiar with the aesthetic theory of Edmund Burke and his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1824). Thus, his descriptions of sublime landscapes sound at times like philosophy homework done well. The naturalist knows what to look at and what should impress him. We ought to recall that Burke lists astonishment as a basic emotion rising from confrontation with “the great and sublime in *nature*” (Burke 1824, 97). Astonishment suspends our mental faculties as we become literally stunned by a given sublime object or sight: “The mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reasons on the object which



employs it” (Burke 1824, 97-98). Darwin describes sublimity as an experience that allows us to discover the limits of our imagination; we are confronted by something that we would not be able to picture in our minds on our own. Hence, Darwin describes the Patagonian plains as sublime; even though they are barren, uninhabited, and infertile, they provide a complete freedom of imagination. Darwin writes: «I can scarcely analyze these feelings: but it must be partly owing to the free scope given to the imagination» (Darwin 2008, 729). That freedom of imagination is provoked by the vastness of the plains, which “are boundless, for they are scarcely passable, and hence unknown: they bear the stamp of having lasted, as they are now, for ages, and there appears no limit to their duration through future time» (Darwin 2008, 729-30).

It is worth stressing this anthropological aspect of perceivable infinity. The plains are not in fact infinite; they only seem to be so because grasping them lies beyond the physical and cognitive abilities of man. The naturalist notices what meanings are assigned to particular objects, phenomena, etc., within the scope of certain perspectives. Continuous references to the European point of view should justly be interpreted as a sign of the imperialistic discourse so deeply rooted in Darwin’s narration. However, they could also be interpreted as a likely unintentional expression of anthropological honesty. Darwin reveals his own perspective as he writes about the world seen and understood through his experiences. In *The Voyage*, Darwin reveals, often incidentally, a fundamental problem related to the later formulated theory of evolution. General natural laws are impersonal, purposeless; man is but one of many animal species, he is not the main focus of nature. And these laws can only be described in a language that is anthropocentric in its essence; a language that anthropomorphizes what is non-human. In her book, *Darwin’s Plots* (2009), Beer investigates the consequences of the literary style adopted by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*—a work that is accessible to ordinary readers as opposed to being esoteric. Beer writes as follows: “He did not *invent* laws. He *described* them. Indeed, it was essential to his project that it should be accepted not as invention, but description. His work is, therefore, conditional upon the means of description: that is upon language” (2009, 46). Darwin will struggle with the anthropocentrism of language and its orientation towards indicating action and the object of that action. In *The Voyage*, the issues related to the coincidental necessity and incompatibility of the language used to describe and understand reality in a “natural” way are evoked by experiences, situations, and observations.

Two attitudes blend in his descriptions of the landscapes: one a subtly naive astonishment drawn out of the ineffable nature of aesthetic experience and the other a steadfast determination to overcome that ineffability and to succeed in describing and explaining it. Darwin writes from the perspectives of both writer and reader. As a reader of travel reports, he is able to assess the quality of the description of, for example, rain forests. As a writer, he paints for these amazing, exotic pictures

just to soberly add, moments later, that they fail to express the true richness of nature.

Darwin singled out *Personal Narrative* by Alexander von Humboldt as the fullest description of South America. Indeed, he sets off on his journey as a literate man who knows what to expect; he has envisioned the unknown lands beforehand. He is also aware that his preconceptions and acquired knowledge may influence his perception of the terrain. The fact that the sight of rain forests exceeded all of his expectations constitutes the best proof for their actual magnificence, which cannot be matched by anything European. Darwin writes: “As the force of impressions generally depends on preconceived ideas, I may add, that mine were taken from the vivid descriptions in the *Personal Narrative* of Humboldt, which far exceed in merit anything else which I have read. Yet with these high-wrought ideas, my feelings were far from partaking of a tinge of disappointment on my first and final landing on the shores of Brazil” (2008, 729). Darwin, while wanting to testify to the magnificence of the Brazilian landscape, curiously confesses his faith in text, literature, and in the power of imagination from which one could almost expect a complete representation of the natural world.

Alexis Harley, in her book *Autobiologies* (2015), notes that the question of the authenticity of the experience of sublimity is justified—did Darwin really feel it or was he just aware that he should feel it? How is one supposed to separate a particular cultural background, instilled by education and literature, from pure experience, which emanates from both external, scientific nature and human, emotional nature? Harley distinguishes two key authors for the scientific approach adopted by Darwin during his expedition, namely John Herschel and Humboldt, who was mentioned earlier. During his studies at Cambridge, Darwin read *Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy* where Herschel assumes personal experience free of all “superstition” to be the only source of cognition. Furthermore, the scientist’s approach is to be free of any subjectivity. Humboldt, on the other hand, uses an antirational and romantic language that anthropomorphizes the non-human world and, additionally, strongly emphasizes a subjective perspective. In this interpretation, Darwin would be torn between two different approaches to the status of personal experiences in scientific discourse. Harley notices that the use of the category of the sublime throughout the diary implies distance to lived experience; “Darwin does not just observe; he observes himself observing, and this evident self-awareness makes trouble for the seeming authenticity of his antirational rhetorical communing with nature” (2015, 57-58). Harley admits later that there is no serious evidence that discredits the authenticity of Darwin’s experience of sublimity. What is interesting is that Darwin’s text contains the very questions that it provokes. He also wonders to what extent previous readings can contaminate or even completely obstruct empirical reality. At the same time, he writes that our capacity to grasp the richness of alien nature depends upon prior knowledge.

## To know and to see

Darwin does not focus solely on experiencing the landscape aesthetically. In his interpretation, aesthetic sensitivity blends with the scientific. The naturalist writes that he sees more than a novice, hence he is able to appreciate more fully the beauty and splendor of nature. What is more, anyone that wishes to go on a journey to foreign lands and really take advantage of the opportunity should possess scientific knowledge.

Admiring landscapes in the course of a journey differs from simply admiring beauty, as the former is based on pleasure coming from the possibility of comparing different views. This is where the scientist has an unmatched advantage over a regular traveler. Thus, only one who knows the components of a landscape, who knows what he is looking at, can really appreciate its beauty: “I am strongly induced to believe that as in music, the person who understands every note will, if he also possesses a proper taste, more thoroughly enjoy the whole, so he who examines each part of a fine view, may also thoroughly comprehend the full and combined effect” (Darwin 2008, 728). He further stresses that when setting off on a journey one should have some understanding of botany, for it is the flora that gives us something to look at to begin with, “for in all views plants form the chief embellishment” (Darwin 2008, 728). Being in contact with nature is like being in contact with art; it can be thoughtless, but true beauty will reveal itself only to the expert. These claims are worth comparing to a difficult to interpret confession from Darwin’s posthumous *Autobiography* (2009).

Therein, he reveals that he suffered from a decline (he describes it as interesting and deplorable) in his higher aesthetic feelings. He writes that up until turning thirty he would take enormous pleasure in reading poetry (during his journey on the *Beagle*, he would not part with Milton’s *Paradise Lost*), Shakespeare’s plays, and above all in music. However, that changed; “but now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost my taste for pictures or music. Music generally sets me thinking too energetically on what I have been at work on, instead of giving me pleasure. I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did” (Darwin 2009, 142-43). As a passionate naturalist he was, however, particularly sensitive to the beauty of nature: “In connection with pleasure from poetry, I may add that in 1822 a vivid delight in scenery was first awakened in my mind, during a riding tour on the borders of Wales, and this has lasted longer than any other aesthetic pleasure” (Darwin 2009, 17).

At the time, he only took pleasure in literature related in some way to facts—namely, novels of manners (which have to have a happy ending), biographies, and travel reports. Darwin writes further: “My mind seems to have become a kind

of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive” (Darwin 2009, 144). This confession is shocking in its directness. According to Browne, the author of Darwin’s monumental biography, his children reacted strongly to this confession and attested to his undiminished interest in beautiful views, music, and poetry. The researcher notes that this philistine attitude was not uncommon among British upper classes; hence, their contrary testimony could not be a question of fear of public stigma. Darwin, so sensitive to even the smallest elements of the living world, simply could not play a fool in the field of aesthetics. Browne writes that “it was as if Darwin was denying his sensitivity to nature, almost turning his back on his special gifts (2002, 645). It is worth noting that Darwin, nauseated by Shakespeare and bored by music, dedicated himself to detailed research of the life of earthworms, testing, among other things, their sensitivity to piano and harpsichord. We should also note that he observed himself as if he were a specimen, at the same time grieving the loss of his aesthetic sensitivity and curiously investigating the reasons behind it. How does one think about art after becoming indifferent to it? In *The Voyage*, Darwin writes about the inevitable ephemerality of experience. In a beautiful paragraph, he describes his last stroll through the Brazilian rain forest, during which he wonders how to convey their beauty and whether he would retain their actual picture in his memory: “In my last walk I stopped again and again to gaze on these beauties, and endeavoured to fix in my mind for ever, an impression which at the time I knew sooner or later must fail. ... Yet they will leave, like a tale heard in childhood, a picture full of indistinct, but most beautiful figures (Darwin 2008, 720). Darwin, while writing the book, tries to capture that moment when we are still aware of those thoughts and experiences that will soon be forgotten. He writes about his lost aesthetic sensitivity in a similar manner—he knows what he is no longer able to experience. Experience of an exotic landscape, impossible to simply convey either in poetic or scientific description, points to a space that cannot be grasped by fact-oriented cognition. Knowledge allows us to see, and by seeing a certain dimension is revealed, which can be embraced and overtaken by knowledge. When perceiving sublimity, knowledge goes blind. But could this “blindness” become an object of knowledge once again?

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# On the Experience of the Urban Landscape: A Commentary on Siegfried Lenz's *Von der Wirkung der Landschaft auf den Menschen*

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## Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to characterize the relation between the urban landscape (the image of the city) and the subject. The landscape is understood here in two ways: as something alien, excluding, and hostile, but also as something that gains new features when in contact with the Other. For it can be said, paraphrasing Siegfried Lenz's famous statement on the relation between man and landscape, that the city is being created through us. The relationship between the residents and the urban landscape has a reciprocal character, in which "I" places itself in relation to a certain "you."

## Key words:

landscape, landscape studies, city, urban studies

*Moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it, on the stage with the other participants. Most often, our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all*

(Lynch 1990, 2)

## Introduction

The active role of the urban landscape (the urban image) in shaping the behavior of the inhabitants of urban areas has been analyzed many times by researchers of cities and urban cultures—especially in physical, aesthetic, political, and functional

aspects (Lynch 1990, Jacobs 1961, Gehl 1987). However, what I want to address here concerns a slightly different level of the relationship between the inhabitants and the city, a level that, although rooted in that which is material, at higher tiers of experience takes on a more subtle form. Let's call it—following Siegfried Lenz—a spiritual relation to the city. I am particularly interested in the urbanity of landscape and in the atmosphere, the aura that the city creates, which, when in contact with the inhabitants, with the Other, acquires new features affecting the quality of existing relations and providing the right conditions for maintaining and developing future connections with the city or for their complete disappearance. Wherein, this Other can also be a subject whose experience of the city is based exclusively on contact with its visual representations (photographs, films, images) rather than its material side, a person staying in the city only temporarily (e.g., a tourist, a migrant)—not “rooted” in the city, or an ordinary resident.

The following considerations take the form of comments referring to the well-known essay by Lenz entitled *Von der Wirkung der Landschaft auf den Menschen* (1998); they constitute an attempt to both popularize the issue of the perception of the urban landscape among landscape researchers (i.e., the issue that is at the intersection of urban studies, landscape studies, and garden studies) and to interpret this text anew. Such an approach obviously has one fundamental flaw—namely, it remains in loose relation to many specific cases not included in Lenz's text. However, it is justified by the general need for drafting the direction of theoretical inquiries that place the issue of the urban landscape experience in the center of the reflection on the Other and the Otherness in the city, which is of most importance to me here. And only then, in a series of papers and analyses, will I be able to focus on particular examples of the relations between the urban landscape and the people who inhabit and experience it.

## The influence of the urban landscape on man

Before proceeding to the analysis of the selected theses included in the text of *Von der Wirkung*, let's examine the dictionary definition of *Landschaft* (landscape) proposed by Zbigniew Kadłubek, reflecting the nature of the problem of the experience of the natural landscape:

*Landschaft* — It is not only a landscape in the familiar Polish sense of an often kitschy image with a view “of.” The term *Landschaft* (also as land-image) is something more than the painterly noun “scenery” of Romanesque origin. Hence, scenery is only an attempt to talk about the land, a report on observation, a description of the land, the arrogance of letters. *Landschaft* bears greater and deeper meaning. According to S. Lenz, *Landschaft* does not exist without man (while scenery does not have to encompass man). *Landschaft* is a *Bruderschaft* with *Land*, with earth, with country; it is the brotherhood of man and space. That is why *Landschaft* is not a view, but an effort to define the bond, the essence



of the relationship. *Landschaft* is a spiritual experience, it is seeing the sacredness of the world and recognizing the work of *genius loci*. ... Scenery is only a fraction, a fragment. *Landschaft* reveals the whole world, even though it does not exist alone; *Landschaft* is always just being created; *Landschaft* is an incident, an event, a meeting. (Kadłubek 2010, 672-673)

How should one understand the “brotherhood of man and space” evoked by Kadłubek? What would this brotherhood consist of? Brotherhood is a familial relationship, an organic community, a blood relation, an interdependence; it is an attachment to the land, water, and clouds of which one is a part; it is a sacrifice and care, and so the strongest relation (unless broken up by death); it is a mutual responsibility for each other forever, which manifests itself in the sense of concern for that which is different than I; it is a constant effort to protect one’s identity from outside forces; it is caring for the identity of the Other, and therefore the influence on, but also consent for, someone else’s autonomy; it is finally a spiritual experience characterized by love and sensuality; it is longing and satisfying the longing—the experience of absence and the fulfillment of a promise of seeing; it is seeing oneself in that which is different, which is not me; it is looking at each other, and finally—as Kadłubek writes—it is the experience of the sacredness of the world, a spiritual thing, *res sacra*. Particularly noteworthy is the final part of Kadłubek’s definition, in which he talks about the eventfulness of *Landschaft*, its temporariness and dependence on someone who is outside, who is watching. For the landscape does not exist independently. What does this mean? It is worth referring here to a musical analogy. For a symphonic piece to resonate, it needs a focused listener. The same is true for the landscape: before it comes into being in the consciousness of the observer, it constitutes, at best, merely the promise of an intimate encounter (of intimacy, satisfaction in relation to the observed object), which has not yet happened and which requires two. Moreover, if, as Kadłubek writes, the whole world (all things visible and invisible) is revealed in landscape, it becomes a bearer of meanings, for example those related to its history, and therefore it also becomes an object of interpretation, understood as an attempt to decipher the language of nature, which speaks also to the condition of our being-in-the-world (if a man still thinks of himself as an important part of nature). Although Lenz uses primarily the term *Landschaft* in his text, I will endeavor to show that his comments may also apply to the urban landscape and its relationship with man.

At the very beginning of *Von der Wirkung*, the author hits a high note and leaves no doubt about his understanding of the relationship between *Land* (earth, land, ground) and man. He writes explicitly: “*Landschaft* gibt es nicht ohne den Menschen. Ohne unsern Blick, unsere Empfindungen, ohne unsere Unruhe und unsere Sehnsucht wäre das, was *Landschaft* genannt wird, nur ein charakteristischer Ausschnitt der Erdoberfläche” (Lenz 1998, 51). There is no reason why we could not repeat after Lenz that without man there is also no city, no urban

landscape (which will become clearer in the course of the argument). It sounds just as strong and convincing as Lenz's original thesis, mainly because man is in fact the "father of cities"—their builder and administrator.

How else does Lenz see our role in being in contact with the landscape? Why does the landscape need us? Well, the landscape needs a viewer. What does that mean? Being seen is a necessary condition for the existence of landscape (of course, in a different sense than in solipsism, where *esse est percipi*). Seeing is a co-creation of its (the landscape's) semantic field. What is more, observation allows the subject to notice the passage of time, and so a change and decomposition; it becomes the source of knowledge that enables the creative transformation of the landscape and enables subduing it. We make changes in the physical world according to our preferences (as a matter of taste), our fears (for our safety), when we want to return to the past (from longing), and under the influence of the environment—rationally and irrationally at the same time! So, let's look somewhat differently at the opening sentence of Lenz's text; let's try to accentuate it. After doing so, it turns out not only that "without man there is no landscape" (*Landschaft gibt es nicht ohne den Menschen*), but also that there is no man without landscape! Man always remains in relation with some sort of external, which has certain physical properties (height, thickness, width, color, temperature, taste, smell, texture) "bombarding" him with sensations. If the landscape is friendly to man, he will survive. If not, he will die. Moreover, our ability to experience (to feel experiences) makes us constantly confront reality, and the more complex and alien it is, the more it affects our sense of comfort and self-confidence (without landscape there are no Others!). I will return to this topic. Meanwhile, Lenz develops his concept of landscape and its impact on man. He writes further that:

*Unter schöpferischem Aspekt entsteht Landschaft also zweimal: bestimmt von Zufall und Notwendigkeit, formt sie sich anfänglich als autonomes Gebilde, das nur für sich ist, und sie wird von neuem erschaffen durch die Erlebnisfähigkeit des Menschen. Ob wir ihr gegenüberstehen oder aus ihr herausgucken: Landschaft entsteht durch uns.* (Lenz 1998, 51)

Cities are also created by chance (*Zufall*) and from necessity (*Notwendigkeit*); however, they cannot exist as a fully autonomous structure (Rykwert 2011). "Cities also believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls", wrote Italo Calvino (1974, 44) in a somewhat poetic spirit. Here the urban landscape clearly connects with *Landschaft*. Although the "multi-appearing" of the city assumes the existence of many ways of capturing the city, only the presence of man and his "ability to experience" ultimately creates the urban landscape, giving new meanings to the existing form. The landscape of the city is also created through us. Let's follow this idea further and examine the role and significance of the natural (and then urban) landscape for man. How does the landscape "work," and how does it affect us? Lenz explains:

*Landschaft — und ich meine zunächst Naturlandschaft — hat dem Menschen seit je das Angebot gemacht, in ihr die Chiffren seines Daseins zu sehen. ... daß von der Landschaft eine erweckende Kraft ausgeht, die sich sowohl an das Gefühl als auch an den Geist wendet. Wozu sie schon früh inspirierte, war vor allem dies: sie bot sich an als Ort wesentlicher Ereignisse. Sie taugte zum erwählten Illusionsraum mythischer, göttlicher, historischer Begebenheiten.* (Lenz 1998, 51)

However, it is not clearly shown in the quoted passage how “the landscape has a reviving power” (*der Landschaft eine erweckende Kraft ausgeht*) that affects the spirit. In my opinion, it is worth looking for the answer to this question in Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of the City* (1990), devoted to the theory of urban form. In the introduction to his book the author writes as follows: “A vivid and integrated physical setting, capable of producing a sharp image, plays a social role as well. It can furnish the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication” (Lynch 1990, 4). The key to understanding the “activity” of the landscape might be its unique visuality, visibility, its sharpness, but also, as Lenz has emphasized, its history—what happened there, what left a mark—the fact that previously the landscape “offered itself as a place of significant events” (*sie bot sich an als Ort wesentlicher Ereignisse*). What does it mean that it “offered itself” (*sie bot sich an*)? What is the role of the subject here—its individual story, knowledge, sensitivity? Are they not meaningless for the “offering” of the landscape? Lenz sets some conditions:

*Um Landschaft erleben, um ihre Wirkung erfahren zu können, bedarfes offenbar gewisser Voraussetzungen. Damit sie etwas in uns hervorruft — eine Stimmung, ein Gefühl oder gar eine Erkenntnis —, müssen wir uns in sie versetzen; wir müssen etwas hinzusehen, — uns selbst mit unserer Befindlichkeit, mit unserer Geschichte. So nur können wir sie als unser Komplement erfahren.* (Lenz 1998, 52)

Do we always have to first know ourselves before we can “experience the landscape” (*um Landschaft erleben*)? Can it make the landscape an integral part of our identity? Do we see in landscape only as much as we ourselves “put” into it? Lenz seems to suggest that the experience of the landscape requires concentration and silence. And what about the city where noise and haste dominate? It is hard to find oneself in the city. It is even harder to experience and see the city in its entirety. The urban landscape is challenging. For us and for any visitor from the outside, it will always be a type of chaotic collection of more or less familiar elements at first, which form an imagined city—namely, a city image that we carry in ourselves created as a result of the work of memory, associations, fantasies, and experiences, and only later will it become a source of deep intimate experiences, provided that we devote time and attention to it. In fact, when we enter a new city, we enter a space and only much later do we give it particular meaning. The initial feeling of alienation accompanying us is only temporary and disappears along with the progressive process of appropriation of space by language. Lenz explains it as follows:

*Sie [Landschaft] löst den Wunsch aus zu vergleichen, und es wundert nicht, daß, wenn wir einen Namen für eine Landschaft suchen, diesen oft im Vergleich finden. Seltsam, daß wir uns nicht damit abfinden können, eine Landschaft namenlos zu lassen; das Bedürfnis, sie zu bezeichnen, ist aufschlußreich genug. In jedem Fall verrät es etwas über unser Verlangen, Welt kenntlich zu machen, um auf diese Weise Sicherheit zu gewinnen, Orientierung, oder sogar heimisch zu werden. (Lenz 1998, 52)*

Giving names to landscapes brings to mind biblical connotations. Here we see the first man in the Garden of Eden, who subdues the visible world by naming its individual elements. The act of naming equals here taking possession (appropriating), but also taming things; as a result, the experienced world ceases to be alien and formidable. The landscape of Paradise becomes an uttered landscape. The word creates the world. Likewise, giving meaning and value to things has its source in our way of perceiving them and talking about them. The word creates the landscape. However, as Lenz writes further:

*Die wesentlichen Wirkungen der Landschaft erfahren wir als inneres Erlebnis. ... Auch darin kann die Wirkung einer Landschaft liegen, daß sie einem vor Augen führt, was dem eigenen Wesen entspricht. Wir werden angeregt, uns selbst zu definieren, und nicht nur dies: in Zusammensicht mit der Landschaft wird uns die Eigenart von Menschen verständlich. (Lenz 1998, 53)*

The landscape, including urban landscape, is a mirror before which we stand, in which we look at ourselves, in which we recognize ourselves or not. This is what we mean by “consistency with the landscape” (*Zusammensicht mit der Landschaft*). Due to the landscape, we get to know ourselves and other people better. The landscape deprives us of the pretenses of life—wakes us from a dream; we have to define ourselves in the face of it, take a stance, agree with it or oppose it, surrender to its charm or fight its ugliness. The stake in this confrontation is being authentic, so being aware of one’s finitude and one’s obligations, but also creating a man-friendly environment for living, in which people can survive and in which they will be able to develop their abilities. The wide range of ideas we have about landscape is helpful in this undertaking:

*Jeder einen gewissen Vorrat an Landschaftsbildern besitzt, — erlebten, nachempfundenen, imaginierten Bildern. Wir können sie auf Abruf oder auf Stichwort hervorbringen so charakteristisch, daß ein anderer sie unmittelbar wiedererkennt. (Lenz 1998, 54)*

Hence, we can “speak” landscape. The landscape evokes in people numerous associations that are often close to their hearts. Until it is tamed, it continues to refer to what we know as well as to fantastic and terrible imaginings. It provides the material of collective memory that serves group communication. The landscape is “spoken,” “uttered,” it is significant (*signifiant*). Each *Landschaft* is almost automatically classified to the already existing set of meanings that we have at our disposal. The need for classification, for naming the place where we find ourselves, is also a way to organize our being-in-the world, our inhabiting the world. “Each of

us is equipped with a certain supply of landscapes” (*Jeder einen gewissen Vorrat an Landschaftsbildern besitzt*) that already represent something. Changing one’s place of residence, traveling, looking at photos, learning the history of a given place, fantasizing about unknown lands—all these activities add new layers of meaning to the images of landscapes already in the semantic pool that we use when we are in a new spatial and cognitive situation. This also applies, and perhaps predominantly so, to being in cities. It is ever more difficult to get lost in one’s own city, yet there are still moments when we look at familiar spaces as if we were not from there. Of course, experiencing urban landscape requires strenuous effort and continuous concentration. The city forces us to exercise our seeing:

*Wir müssen disponiert sein, uns von einer Einsicht unterwandern, von einer Erkenntnis überwältigen zu lassen. Was Landschaft uns echohaft beweist: unsere Vergänglichkeit, unser Harmonieverlangen, unsere Sehnsucht nach Dauer — wir müssen offen genug sein, diese Beweise anzuerkennen.* (Lenz 1998, 55)

And we read further:

*Es steht außer Zweifel: die Wirkung, die Landschaft auf den Menschen ausübt, hat vielfältige Ausdrucksformen: Andacht und Ängstigung, Staunen und Schwermut, Glücksempfinden und Ewigkeitsschauer — wir kennen den Widerhall aus eigenem Erleben. Und solange sich unsere Erlebnisfähigkeit erhält, können wir der auslösenden Echos sicher sein.* (Lenz 1998, 56)

Obviously, it is not always possible to precisely determine what the landscape does and its impact on us; Lenz is not that optimistic. There is also the area of the unspoken—feelings and moods that accompany our encounters with the landscape, which we cannot name, which create a mystery.

On the margins of the reflections on the influence of the natural landscape on man, Lenz finally writes about the urban landscape; however, he devotes only three brief remarks to it. The first concerns the city understood as the cultural landscape, the second is about the urban landscape used as a tool of power, and the third is devoted to the city understood as a “cityscape” (*Stadtschaft*)—namely, the exemplification of the image of destruction and decay. Let’s start with the first one:

*Längst ist die Kulturlandschaft eine vollendete Tatsache. Fontane selbst zählte zusammen, was zu ihrem Bild gehört, und erwähnte Raps und Weizenfelder, üppige Wiesen, er sah die roten Dächer eines Dorfes hinzu und Flöße und Kähne auf den Seen und Kanälen. Wir können das Bild von uns aus erweitern, lassen Wege durch die Weidelandschaft laufen, spannen eine Brücke über den Fluß, legen Hecken und Garten an, schaffen einen von Bäumen eingeschlossenen Platz. Kulturlandschaft läßt die gestaltende und pflegerische Tätigkeit des Menschen erkennen, sie stellt uns vors Auge, mit welchen Absichten der Mensch die selbstgenügsame Eigenart der Natur veränderte. Um leichter zu leben, um effizienter zu leben, hat er planend eingegriffen, hat reguliert, bereinigt, gegliedert, und mitunter glückte ihm das Organisationswunder einer Stadt, die wir selbstverständlich als Kulturlandschaft ansehen.* (Lenz 1998, 57)

What does the cultural landscape (*Kulturlandschaft*) say about man? First of all, it allows for recognizing his intentions—“a creative and nursing activity” (*gestaltende*

*und pflegerische Tätigkeit*), which can also be destructive, for people's intentions are not always noble and their effects desirable. Two important characteristics of the city stand out in the quoted passage. First of all, the cultural landscape has begun to displace the natural landscape (and today, we must admit that we live in a reality that is urbanized and degraded as never before); the city is an assault upon nature by man—it was created against nature. To live more easily, to indulge oneself, man “in a planned way, attacked” (*hat er planend eingegriffen*) the self-sufficiency of nature, he “regulated” (*reguliert*), “settled” (*bereinigt*), and “structured” (*gegliedert*) nature.

*Der Mensch sich mit der Vorgefundenen Eigenwilligkeit der Natur nicht abfinden wollte. Er gestaltete sie nach seinen Bedürfnissen, mit seinen Möglichkeiten um immer darauf aus, ihr etwas abzugewinnen.* (Lenz 1998, 58).

The city is organized in a rational manner, while nature is wild, autonomous, and therefore free. There is something fake (phony) about the urban landscape, while the natural landscape is real. The city is the domain of culture, which is served by nature. At the same time, according to Lenz, the city is “an organizational wonder” (*Organisationswunder*) that was “successful.” Just like that? Could it have failed? Today we know that it could have. There are cities that function better or worse, but there are also those in which life has died out—so-called ghost towns. Contemporary, great Chinese ghost cities are the best example of this phenomenon. While on the topic of ghost cities and towns, let's read another remark by Lenz:

*Vieles muß Landschaft über sich ergehen lassen; Heide und Wattenmeer, Flußtal und Moor: sie sind einem Planungswillen ausgesetzt, dessen Wirken nicht folgenlos bleiben kann. Und immer deutlicher hebt sich eine Erscheinung in unser Blickfeld, die es nur noch verdient, Stadtschaft genannt zu werden: rostende Industrieanlagen, schmauchender wandernder Müll, zum Abbruch freigegebene Wohnsiedlungen, verödete Plätze, über die der Wind Plastikketzen treibt, hinüber zur Kleingarten-Kolonie. Es liegt auf der Hand: auch diese Stadtschaft übt eine Wirkung auf den Menschen aus; wir haben sie als Trauer und Erbitterung erlebt, haben sie auch in allen Formen der Selbstbezeichnung wahrgenommen. Das Mitleid mit der gefährdeten Landschaft wächst, es wächst mit zunehmendem Wohlstand.* (Lenz 1998, 60)

Lenz seems to suggest that human activity has mainly harmful effects on the natural landscape. A new being comes to existence. If *Landschaft* was *Bruderschaft* with *Land*, with earth, “the brotherhood of man and space,” then what will *Stadtschaft* be? The breaking of those friendly ties? An assault on *Land*? Abandoning responsibility for the Other, which is the landscape? An irreversible separation from nature, that is, from the original ontic belonging of man? A source of mourning after a lost, once inhabited, and thus tame, home? A source of bitterness, anger, and remorse due to the damage done? Interestingly, the negative image of *Stadtschaft* is related here to an increase in prosperity, and so to consumption (the production of trash), to the development of new industries (pollution of the environment, deforestation),



and the bystander effect—passively observing a catastrophe, passing responsibility for the landscape on to others. However, nature continuously calls for what belongs to it; it keeps trying to break into cities, trying to regain them. Lenz's last remark concerns, as I have already mentioned, the spaces of power in the city:

*Doch es hat auch nicht an Versuchen gefehlt, Landschaft zu benutzen, um den Menschen aus dem Gleichgewicht zu bringen, ihn klein und gefügig zu machen. Erdrückt von monströsen Dimensionen, eingeschüchtert von kalter Leere, sollte der Mensch nach dem Willen von Mächtigen zu einer einzigen Funktion hingelenkt werden, zur Funktion der Brauchbarkeit. Gewaltige Aufmarschgelände, Achsen, eintönige endlose Straßen, riesenhafte Bauwerke ... Die beabsichtigte Wirkung zeigt sich in einem Verlust des Selbstbewußtseins, in einer Bereitschaft zur Unterwerfung. (Lenz 1998, 58-59)*

This is an example of landscape influencing man in a negative and aggressive way. The landscape that dominates an individual, that delights and terrifies at the same time, has long ceased to belong exclusively to the realm of dreams of more radical visionaries of architecture (Sudjic 2005). The urban landscape that “takes away the sense of balance” in order to make man “small and docile” (*klein und gefügig*) was one of the curses of the twentieth century (Jencks 1973). Lenz warns that a man that loses his confidence because of the city is far from his humanity—having lost it, he can only serve. Unfortunately, the bold visions of city planners that reduce the individual to the role of a cog in the machine of progress, despite the assurances of specialists in sustainable development, still persist. In the end, hope for the improvement of the quality of urban space remains in the hands of architects serving the people.

## Conclusion

Is it even possible to talk about urban landscape, or should one talk about the landscape of one particular city? Are all cities in fact similar? Are they representations of one idea? What does the city have to do with the wild space that is trying to settle in it? Does the city need man? Is the urban landscape just another variation of the natural landscape, and therefore can it be experienced in the same way? Tadeusz Ślawek, in his essay “Miasto. Próba zrozumienia” (City: An Attempt to Understand), writes as follows: “In order to experience the city, we have to extract it from movement being only a hasty commute ‘from-to’; we have to liberate it from the purposefulness determined by the first and final stops. But at the same time, we must not be content with contemplative reflection on the stillness of the walls: by learning about their history, studying the slow build-up of ‘layer over layer,’ we begin to experience the city” (Ślawek 2010, 46). However, such a proposal, though intuitively familiar, does not take into account the answers to all of the above questions, reducing the spiritual, spontaneous dimension of the relationship with the urban landscape to a cognitive function based on an arduous acquisition

of knowledge—on studying the city. It also does not take into account other ways of “soft” experiencing of the urban landscape. Of course, the romantic method of cognition proposed by Lenz, who many times explicitly speaks of feeling and empathy, is also insufficient, and yet “contemplative reflection on the stillness of the walls,” as I have tried to prove, opens an interesting perspective in the study of urban landscape.

*Kleine Wildnisse, die könnten eine Antwort sein auf die Anmutungen gewaltsamer Landschaftsgeometrie. Und welche Wirkungen selbst begrenzte Wildnis auf den Menschen hat, das hat offener Sinn überall registriert: wir staunen und beunruhigen uns, wir sind begeistert und erschauern, wir empfinden Sehnsucht und ein rätselhaftes Gefühl von Dauer. Wir nehmen Bild und Zeichen auf, spüren das Echo, das Wildnis in uns auslöst, es wird uns bewußt, daß wir der Landschaft zugehörig sind. Und vielleicht ist das die tröstliche Erkenntnis, die Landschaft uns vermitteln kann: die Erkenntnis, heimisch zu sein.* (Lenz 1998, 60-61)

The strictly scientific approach is not enough for Lenz. And aside from that, is not the vision of becoming friendly with space more intuitive, treating it with affection, just as we would someone we just met? When does the strangeness of the landscape—the Other—disappear? Do we just need to get to know each other better? Some urban landscapes cannot be denied wildness, which is not to be found in cities designed with great precision. But how can one measure wildness, how can one tame it? Scientific language, despite improving its cognitive tools, still does not touch upon the essence of the problem. Could it be that the great lover of natural landscape, Siegfried Lenz,<sup>1</sup> agrees here with the great admirer of cities—of Venice and St. Petersburg, Josif Brodski (1987, 1993)—that poetry turns out to be the icing on the cake of knowledge and understanding?

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<sup>1</sup> Lenz devoted a significant part of his work to the Mazury. In 2011, he became an honorable citizen of Elk, Poland.



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# A history of non-human lives: social weeds<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

The author analyzes Karolina Grzywnowicz's installation *Weeds* (2015): a meadow which the artist re-planted from two villages in Bieszczady—whose inhabitants had been resettled in 1944-1950—into a site adjoining a street in Warsaw. The meadow was promptly mowed by the municipal services, and thus became a twofold commemoration. First, it was a deliberately created yet subtle and poetical monument to the displaced people. Second, in a manner unanticipated by the artist, it grew into a symbolic martyrdom memorial of the "green urban anarchists": weeds in other words. The author analyzes the relationships between non-human lives and history, asking whether the marginal history of plants is ever noticed in scientific and social reflection, as well as wondering about the role of plants in commemoration and why they fail as a medium of memory.

## Key words:

art, history, memory, nature, non-human beings

The work by Karolina Grzywnowicz delves into relationships between non-human lives and history. However, has the peripheral history of plants to which the author draws attention been noted by scientific and social reflection? What role do plants play in the context of commemoration?

The protagonists in this text are apple, pear, plum, and cherry trees, gooseberry and currant bushes, hazels, walnut trees, lindens, cutleaf coneflowers, daffodils, irises, asters, dwarf periwinkles, boxwoods, guelder-roses, common nettles, couch grasses, Alpine docks, centaureas; the reminiscence also features flax dodder and flat-seeded false flax, and there are the rarely encountered flame adonis, shepherd's-needle, summer pheasant's-eye, hedgehog parsley, cowherb, field fennel, staggerweed, corn buttercup, blue pimpernel, common corn-cockle, roundleaf cancerwort, sharpleaf cancerwort, common catchfly, rye brome, yellow star-of-Bethlehem, and field larkspur.

<sup>1</sup> This text was written during the seminar held by Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska in 2016-2017 entitled *Historical policies versus history and memory — selected case studies*.

The installation entitled *Weeds*<sup>2</sup> is a meadow that Grzywnowicz transplanted from two villages in Bieszczady whose inhabitants had been resettled in 1944–1950. Paweł Mościcki wrote about the installation: “the poetic in the project begins from listening into the silent protest of the earth, which compels the abandoned plants to endure and develop, despite political decisions” (Mościcki, nd; no longer accessible). Post-war resettlements were carried out on a tremendous scale. The Recovered Territories were bathed in the mythology of a return to the “cradle of Polishness,” to the “bosom of the motherland,” a civilization that began with the house of Piast. This was accompanied by special metaphors of Ithaca, Colchis, or Arcadia, where the golden fleece and gardens of paradise awaited the new inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, not a thing was heard about the 600,000 people who were deported from Bieszczady, Beskid Niski, Beskid Sądecki, Pogórze Przemyskie, and Roztocze in the course of two resettlement undertakings: “repatriation” of the Ukrainian population to the USSR (1944–1946), which displaced 480,000 people, and Operation Vistula (1947–1950), during which 140,000 were relocated. Grzywnowicz repeats that gesture with respect to plants. Fragments of forgotten gardens travel hundreds of kilometers, from one end of Poland to another. This immediately provokes questions among observers: does it make sense? Will the plants adapt to the new environment? Will they survive? Is it not barbaric? The very questions that should have arisen and been asked in the context of the eviction and forced displacement of Lemkos and Ukrainians in the past. After all, ectozoochory (the dispersal of seeds, spores, and seedlings by animals) is nothing new to plants; on the contrary, it is a strategy of survival and proliferation.

The dwellings and the villages would often be burned down—only the old gardens, fields, and orchards remained. “Plants are an ever-regenerating and permanent testimony to the presence of people in places they had long abandoned. Changes in the structure and chemical composition of the soil go so far as to enable those species to survive even for the next 600 years. Knowledge of the plants helps one find resettled villages, can serve to reconstruct their topography and provides a key to the understanding of that space” (Grzywnowicz, n.d.). The situation is akin to the history of Kupferberg (Miedzianka in Lower Silesia), described by Filip Springer. In a town which disappeared from the surface of the earth after six centuries of affluent existence, the writer looks for traces of life like an archaeologist. What he encounters are plants, once companions of the human beings, now taking their place. The doom of the town is heralded by the disappearance of

2 The project was carried out as part of the “i na 1 — Mistrz i Uczeń” program by the Association of Creative Initiatives “ę” and presented for the first time in autumn 2015 at Zachęta Project Room. Subsequently, the installation moved to the embankment on the Vistula, in the vicinity of the University Library and the Copernicus Science Centre, as part of Bęc Zmiana’s series *Synchronization*. The 2016 edition was devoted to seeking balance in organizing and designing urban and social space. Its core theme was “unsustainable architecture,” construed as creating an environment that fulfills dreams of better future.

3 See Nijkowski (2006), Gieba (2017).

a cherry tree which is swallowed by a fissure caused by the subsidence of a uranium mine (Springer 2011). The process had already been described by Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina in connection with the Great War:

The house stood on the frontline—the people had to abandon their home. And even though later the storm of war went by and died down, they did not return. Meanwhile, in the deserted garden surrounding the empty dwelling strange things began to happen. [...]

‘War!’ And thousands of hate-spewing voices followed suit, ‘War! War! War!’

Things seethed, and commotion stirred through the Garden from end to end. The ditches, the paths, and the laws were raided by countless packs of weeds, followed by mercenary troops of destruction-wreaking insects, marching in close ranks. [...] As far as the eye could see, across the turf, paths, and squares, weeds—fat and sinewy, sticky and stinging—drove unstopably towards the flowerbeds and the patches. In a moment, they would descend on the less numerous residents of the Garden and crush them with the mass of their bodies, stifle them in a deadly embrace. Yet here they halted, as if rooted to the spot: just in front of them [...] there appeared the King of the Garden, Marcin, and a little, red girl. [...] Marcin and Iruchna sat down on the porch under the eaves of the garden house and, cuddled together, looked with a smile on the frolicking frogs, on the birds washing dust off their tired wings, on flowers, vegetables and trees drinking in the gifts of the skies in the serenity of heart rejoicing with victory. (Szelburg-Zarembina 1972, 251, 252, 336)

In this excerpt from the short story *Ogród króla Marcina* (King Martin’s Garden) the mixing of ornamental plants with weeds means prolongation of war and a hostile invasion. Only people are capable of putting a stop to it and yet again becoming guarantors of security in the garden. A similar description may be found in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, published a few years earlier. There is no place for weeds there, the baleful other of gardens, though “common” plants do appear. If indeed Marx vies with Darwin for intellectual leadership (Domańska 2010), it is worthwhile to note that in the English garden the “class division” between plants is lifted. “The seeds Dickon and Mary had planted grew as if fairies had tended them. Satiny poppies of all tints danced in the breeze by the score, gaily defying flowers which had lived in the garden for years and which it might be confessed seemed rather to wonder how such new people had got there” (Burnett 1911, 296). The protagonists of that pantheistic novel for children which had been inspired by Christian Science, Martha and Dickon Sowerby, are representatives of a lower class—the servants—and it is they who bring new seeds to enrich the aristocratic flowerbeds. In a hardly noticeable way, they change the social arrangements. Interestingly enough, Burnett and her religious community would have probably subscribed to some of Marx’s assertions:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions

between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. (Marx 1932, 197—198)

This is exactly what happened to Mary Lennox and Colin Craven: spoiled, unkind, and physically weak children who thanks to working in the mysterious garden begin to flourish acquiring both physical and moral fortitude. In his now classic text, Neil Smith (1984) engaged in an extensive critique of the notion of nature, questioning the intuitive yet well-established division into “first” and “second” nature. In his opinion, there is no longer any nature one controls and a nature one creates to achieve mastery over the latter. Through human labor and the production of nature at the global scale, human society has placed itself squarely at the center of nature. To wish otherwise is nostalgic. This centrality in nature is what fuels the crazy quest of capital actually to control nature, but the idea of control over nature is a dream. It is the dream dreamt each night by capital and its class, in preparation for the next day's labor, as he wrote. (Smith 1984) Smith is also a pessimist as far as “bourgeois” ecology is concerned, observing that each change gives rise to new markets within capitalism: regulation of greenhouse gas emissions led to trade in permits, while biotechnologies drove large corporations into patent races. Commodification of natural assets and global production of nature have severely affected biodiversity. Nowhere can one find room for the green anarchy of plants that are deemed undesirable in cultivation. The human has become so efficient in their eradication that at present some weeds are either utterly extinct or have been entered into regional red lists of vanishing or extremely threatened species. The meadows where weeds were once to be found have been disappearing as well, though the weeds had been previously eliminated on agricultural meadowland. In Europe today, special programs have been implemented to protect these plants: seed collections are established, conservative cultivation is employed, while “weed gardens” have become something of a fashion.

The form of the work presented in autumn 2015 at the Zachęta Project Room brought Albrecht Dürer's *The Great Piece of Turf* to mind. In the past, floral motifs used to adorn everything, from dresses and paintings to temples (such as the famed polychromies and frescos in St. Martin's Church in Bamberg, most often referred to as *Himmelsgarten*, the heavenly garden), with a wealth of symbolism that developed around them (somewhat ambivalent in the case of grasses and herbs—from Christian to pagan). However, the perceptual habits of the contemporary viewer do not permit conducting an iconological analysis of vegetal representations. It is only to be regretted, since they would be able to supply unique knowledge of historical and cultural circumstances which engendered the exploitation and protection of the “Kingdom of Flora.” “I love thine bare feet, / For they tread on brittle

dew, telling a-blind the cornflowers and the corncockle,” wrote Bolesław Leśmian (Leśmian, 1920). This is a very interesting example of how the interpretation of usefulness of plants fluctuated. In the poem, corncockles are a pest one can tread on, whereas cornflowers are friendly and beautiful “morsels of blue” in the field. Cornflowers would very often recur as a motif in poetry, always evoking positive associations. Their color also justifies the traits at the connotative core of the words “beauty,” “happiness,” “love,” “faithfulness,” “good,” “innocence,” or “sinlessness.” After the war, poets not infrequently attributed quite the opposite qualities to the same plant: “it is a weed,” “it is eradicated” (Kuryłowicz 2012). This clearly shows how arbitrarily the role of plants is determined and how it shifts over time, not to mention how fragile their safety is. The title of a nineteenth-century volume demonstrates that today the utilitarian history of various species is more transparent: *Popular botany comprising the description of trees, shrubs and green plants both domestic and foreign, peculiar in their qualities and history, as well having use in industry, arts, crafts, household and farm* (Pisulewski 1845; published in Polish). And yet the term “weed” does not feature in any botanical taxonomy, since the category is molded solely from the standpoint of and with respect to humans. The struggles of a gardener fighting weeds are also a metaphor of the fight with “social pests” and the Shoah, to which Zygmunt Bauman refers:

Whoever had a garden once knows that before flowers bloom and the shrubs they planted grow, a perfect garden is envisioned: where and what should be and how aesthetic harmony is to be achieved on that plot of land surrounded by a fence. The moment that ideal arrangement is there, all potential residents of the garden, all plants which were to take root there, have been rapidly divided into two categories: the useful plants and all other vegetation that was not intended, weeds in other words. ... Well, being is not a trait peculiar to a plant. A weed is not a peculiar trait of a plant. It derives from how the gardener looks at it, deciding that it (i.e., the plant) does not tally with the pre-statutory horticultural norm. (Bagiński and Jóźwicki, n.d.)

Often enough, plants which may even be closely related to cultivated ones are considered weeds. In order to use flax effectively as a product, human has utterly wiped out the co-occurring species, such as flax dodder and flat-seeded false flax. Ludwik Hieronim Morstin had already made the prophetic warning: “I cannot drive the ploughshare into earth, for it will only mince the flowers with dust in the field, cut through bluebottles and the corncockle’s abundant bloom, which shines akin to a dream. And said it is that woe betide the earth if it loses flowers, for flax alone will not make human garb” (Morstin 1909, 10–11).

Grzywnowicz shows over six decades of coexistence of plants with people, perceived as useful or vegetal “pests.” The gardens, abandoned under duress, are spontaneously grown over by weeds, but they remain gardens thanks to species which in a singular fashion “remember” the coexistence with humans. At this point,

one should recall assertions presuming plant intelligence. As Daniel Chamovitz wrote:

the question, should not be whether or not plants are intelligent—it will be ages before we all agree on what that term means; the question should be, ‘Are plants aware?’ and, in fact, they are. Plants are acutely aware of the world around them. They are aware of their visual environment; they differentiate between red, blue, far-red, and UV lights and respond accordingly. ... Plants know when they are being touched and can distinguish different touches. They are aware of gravity: they can change their shapes to ensure that shoots grow up and roots grow down. And plants are aware of their past: they remember past infections and the conditions they’ve weathered and then modify their current physiology based on these memories. (Chamovitz 2012, 157)

Numerous works of art and commemorations utilize plants as metaphors, yet it rarely happens that commemoration relies on the memory of plants themselves.

In Warsaw, plants were on the verge of having a memorial of their own. They would have been able to naturally commemorate a multicultural site: the bazaar known as Jarmark Europa, the phantom “city within a city,” a hope for a better life for thousands of people from various parts of the world or a place where a life came to an end (if only to recall the death of Nigerian Maxwell Itoya, who was shot there by a Polish policeman). At the top of the bowl and between the rows of seats soon to be demolished stadium, Marek Ostrowski and a team of researchers found many plants whose presence in Warsaw was nothing short of astonishing. Gilles Clément refers to such places as “third landscapes” (n.d.); in order for such a wild site to be called a third landscape it has to emerge spontaneously, as opposed to being a trace of a garden once designed by a human. The most vivid popular example in cities are the surroundings of tracks and lines.

No one paid attention to the fact that right next to the bustling bazaar, new life came into being on the disused stands, and the stadium began to fill with new organisms. ... At first, the changes were insignificant, virtually imperceptible to an unskilled observer. A tiny piece of poplar fluff, borne by the wind, would land into a crevice in the cracked concrete, from which a several-centimeter-long seedling of poplar would germinate over the next few days. A bird perched there for a moment, leaving a black-and-white spot of droppings, which contained minute, one-seeded stones of black elder. The seeds, partly digested in the bird’s alimentary tract, were additionally stimulated into germination. Someone from the bazaar spat out grape seeds over their shoulder. Having fallen on the stands, it grew after a few years into climbers running several meters in length. [...] As the vegetation proliferated on the stadium, microclimatic conditions at the site changed as well. Mass emergence of plants on the stands reduced thermic contrasts and promoted a milder climate. Gradually, a network of dependencies developed between the habitat (climate and edaphic conditions) and the species composition of animal and plant life. Subsequent developments may be forecast based on vegetal expansion observed so far. Had the stadium not undergone conversion, in several years’ time its bowl would have been filled by a forest of trees, visible from afar as



a green ‘mop’ swaying with the wind above its crown. Thus, with the contribution of plants a new, astonishing architectural form would have come into existence—a monument to the vitality of nature in places abandoned by humans. (Ostrowski, Sudnik-Wójcikowska, and Galera 2008, 98, 101)

A similar vision works well only in the utopian projects of ecological urban planning.<sup>4</sup> This kind of functional shift aimed at transforming a no longer needed stadium would also find justification in the futuristic *Hotel Polonia. The Afterlife of Buildings*, hatched by artists Nicolas Groszpiere and Kobas Laksa as well as curators Grzegorz Piątek and Jarosław Trybuś, winner of the Golden Lion at the Architecture Biennale in Venice. In the real world, the influence of developers and the material value of urban space effectively hinder such solutions from ever being implemented.

In her subsequent project, Grzywnowicz reverses the vector and examines how people remember plants and how the latter become witnesses to history: *Grün | Green* consists in searching for plants that have been important for the people of Wrocław as well as their associated stories, thereby rendering a map of individual “green memorials.” “The author is interested in the history and identity of the city as it is recorded in plants ... she is going to investigate the attitudes of inhabitants towards greenery in the city, focusing on trees in particular. It is the trees which are witnesses to history and represent links between Breslau and Wrocław; not infrequently, they are the backdrop to major events, collective and individual alike” (Wrocenter, n.d.). In any case, the story of Joanna Paśniewska demonstrates that the phenomenon is not limited to that region:

My grandmother ended up in Międzyrzecz<sup>5</sup> (in the present day Lubuskie Region) right after the war, coming from Płock, as her railwayman father received a new posting in the Recovered Territories. At the time you were already able to settle in former German houses, taking entire farms as your own. Grandma used to retell the story in quite a colorful fashion: she would often remember the soup left in plates on the table, a detail illustrating the panic in which Germans had fled. The mayor of the town, Herr Haak, acting upon instructions from above, kept the residents in an illusory idyll of safety, convinced that everything is under control until the very last day before the tanks of the Red Army reached the Międzyrzecz area and everyone had to be immediately evacuated. When, after the war, my grandfather Henryk found his wife—returning from five-years’ incarceration in Dachau (where he was sent as a teacher of mathematics during the *Intelligenzaktion* in spring 1940)—he was less than enchanted with having to live among

4 “In an ecological perspective, urban planning means a skill of building structures which sustain urban life and managing their development in accordance with the laws of nature and culture, as well as a science concerned with the fundamentals of rational performance of such tasks by various institutions of civil society” (Zuziak 2007, 9–20 xx).

5 Previously German Meseritz. From 1942 to 1945 in the hospital in Obrawalde some 10,000 people were killed as part of the Aktion T4; in the town and its surroundings there were also POW and forced labor camps.

mementoes of German presence. The silver trays inscribed with Fraktur were found to be fit only for hens, while grandfather himself refused to eat plums and apples from trees that belonged to the former household. He would say that German blood ran in them. Grandma Hala tended to the garden with great tenderness, and long after grandfather had died, she would tell us tales of the garden's plants, recalling and commemorating—without a distinct reason—the German lineage of trees, shrubs, and flowers. This grandmother's account of the bi-national garden became a family fable.<sup>6</sup>

A strategy resembling the one in *Grün* and *Weeds* was adopted by Łukasz Surowiec in the 2012 project *Berlin-Birkenau*. The artist dug out young birches from the Birkenau area and planted them in school gardens and public spaces in Berlin. The young trees travel in the opposite direction of Jews deported from Berlin to the concentration camp. Surowiec intends to highlight the blending of remembering with the daily activity of tending to the plant, compelling one to rethink the role of recipients of commemoration.

Monuments, plaques, historical sites, preserved without change or reconstructed, located in particular spaces, as well as the recurring anniversary celebrations are important elements of the cityscape, to a large extent reflecting the state of collective memory and the mode in which continuity of identity is built. However, one must not overlook that cultural forms of commemoration are associated with historical policies pursued at the time. After the watershed of 1989, a number of commemorations were no more, some were widely disputed, and a few new ones emerged. At the same time the issues of counter-memory, post-memory, and the status of commemoration became material to work on for contemporary artists. John Bondar claims that public memory today is forged in the strife or dialogue of various social groups, representing a compromise between official and vernacular memory.<sup>7</sup> Plants incorporated in the commemoration narratives endow them with a temporal and performative nature. Thus, memorials change their shape and continually yield new meanings. The apprehension surrounding the cultural role of plants may perhaps lie in the subconscious European association with paganism (in contrast to Far Eastern systems of belief), which was addressed by Matthew Hall (2011). The fear prevents us from entering into relationships with plants, abolishing the hardened dividing lines which delineate their and our domains. Consequently, such green monuments still tend to “happen” and elicit anxiety in the viewers—especially in their founders.

On the night, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, 2016, unidentified individuals vandalized the Memorial to the Extermination of the Roma People in Borzęcin. It is located in a forest, far from human dwellings, and as such recalls the hundreds of sites in the woods where people had been executed. This aspect is analyzed by Roma Sendyka,

<sup>6</sup> Joanna Paśniewska's family reminiscence, delivered during Prof. Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska's workshop *Historical policies versus history and memory—selected case studies*, is a commentary to this text.

<sup>7</sup> See Bondar (1992), Assmann (2013).

who draws attention to the erstwhile markings of forest graves: “the flawed non-human tokens made of stones, litter and broken twigs, half-funereal, half-soulless ... should thus be considered as possibility of a monument’, ambivalent and disquieting though it may be, but a monument nevertheless” (Sendyka 2017). The author of the design, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, drew on the potential memory of the forest:

I decided to fashion the monument using larch wood. I found it to be an ideal material, as I did not wish the monument to flaunt gold lettering, marbles, granites and so on. ... I thought that what had happened there left a mark on that place, and only trees can pass it on to a tree. The forest remembers and my initial impression was that they are a kind of silent witnesses. Now a little larger and older. Obviously, the monument is sure to change as years go by, begin to live its own life, the forest is certain to adopt it somehow and it will become a part of this place ... but this is how it should be; it is to be a part of the forest which remembers the crying, the dread, the fear the shooting, the faces. (Gancarz 2011, 268)

The process of the monument’s merging into the forest was disrupted by a nationalistic act of vandalism.<sup>8</sup> Integration of plant expression into memorial projects has never gained recognition in Poland, beginning with the most notorious and controversial design submitted in 1958 to an international competition for a memorial to the victims of fascism in Auschwitz-Birkenau: the concept was entitled *The Road*. It relied on Oskar Hansen’s conception of Open Form according to which a monumental sculpture would be molded. Setting out from the premise that the entire area of the camp was a site of tragic experience, Hansen’s team came forward with an idea to build a broad asphalt road running through it. Cutting the camp in two with a road and welding the main entrance gate shut would be a symbolic gesture of crossing out the crime committed there as something that must never happen again. The road would provide a background to individual acts of commemoration by those who visited the site: stones associated with the Jewish tradition, lights, or other mementoes left on its edges. The camp barracks stretching on either side would be left alone, yielding with time to slow entropy. The area of the camp, gradually growing over with forest, was to remind one of the time which had elapsed since the tragic events. Former prisoners could not bear the sight of Birkenau overgrown with chamomile and rejected the concept of *The Road*. Meanwhile, Ewa Domańska observes that even though organic remnants may mix with other elements of the ecosystem, the process does not degrade the humanity of the deceased, but validates their potential (biological) existence.

In the perspective of very long persistence, the spaces of the Holocaust, seen from an eco-necro standpoint, also become figures of a viable community and a symbiotic diaspora: an ecumene of varied life forms. (Domańska 2017, 34—61)

<sup>8</sup> The monument was vandalized on April 22, 2016; the stele was knocked off of the concrete plinth, while the sculptures were chopped into pieces with an axe.

However, the jury imposed a compromise, under which three shortlisted designs would be combined into one.<sup>9</sup> Oskar Hansen withdrew from the compromise, whose outcome may be seen today at the end of the tracks in Birkenau. Looking at the monument from the perspective of the present day, one readily sees that in aesthetic terms it belongs to a bygone era; now, it is virtually out of place, ill-suited (Pietrasik 2017).

*Paradise*, a project developed by Mirosław Duchowski's team for the Warsaw neighborhood of Szmulowizna, shared a similar fate. They conceived a memorial to Shmuel Jakubowicz (Joseph Samuel Sonnenberg), also known as Zbitkover, founder and owner of that part of the Praga district, in the form of an open, public orchard, whose fruits would be for everyone to enjoy, local inhabitants and tourists alike. After all, *Gan Eden*, the "garden of delights," was not only a symbol of the covenant between God and humanity, but also between God, humanity, and nature: "and the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2: 8–9). The welcoming retreat would encourage reflection on the extraordinary story of Henri Bergson's ancestor, make one think of the fates of pre-war Jewish residents of Szmulki, and the shape of Polish-Jewish dialogue (for which the idea of the garden of paradise—shared by all religions of the Book—provided a fitting metaphor). One may note at this point that, next to weeds, old orchards are another object of concern and conservation efforts. However, the interests of a developer aiming to build a gated estate on the premises of the former spirits manufactory prevailed: the idea to incorporate a public space into the development plan was rejected. We can thus return to Neil Smith's deliberations, which recall the history of debate taking place in the British forum for critical and radical geographers (crit-geog-forum.uk) relating to politics of gardening. Smith posed a question, why did an initial serious inquiry about the politics of gardening seem to unleash such pent-up political responses in a way that global events did not, even such serious ones as the famine in Sudan or the revolt in Indonesia (Smith 2000). Cities dominate in the world and, condensing life as they do, vividly expose the links between capital and local municipal authority. To describe the relationship, the urban geographer coins the notion of *geobribe* (Smith 2002). Gentrification investments and more modest, borough-range activities are channels for the flow of global capital and people. The plans of urban space reflect the relations of power and manifest

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<sup>9</sup> The person elected as chair of the jury in the competition for the International Memorial to the Victims of Fascism was Henry Moore, at the time considered one of the most eminent living sculptors. The event was remembered by means of an exhibition entitled *Moore/Auschwitz*, Tate Britain, London, May 10–June 13, 2010; curator: Ewa Toniak, arrangement: Małgorzata Szczęśniak, collaboration: Agata Pietrasik, Łukasz Kwietniewski.

the most radical forms of oppression, exclusion, and inequality. City gardens and green areas are also a gentrification frontier under siege.

In this light, the installation by Grzywnowicz becomes a two-fold commemoration. Firstly, a deliberate one—a subtle poetic memorial to the displaced. Such an interpretation of the work is currently very important and relevant,<sup>10</sup> because that chapter in history has been repressed from the official discourse of historical politics.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, it is a symbolic monument of martyrdom of “green urban anarchists” or rather “true rhizomatic revolutionaries,” in a way against the intentions of the artist. After all, how did we bid farewell to *Weeds*? In 2016 the artist handed her work over to the city of Warsaw. The meadow brought from the resettled locations was placed on the Kościuszko Wharf, near Lipowa street. It is to remain there for good, enriching the Cubryna Square. The artist signed an agreement with the municipal property boards, according to which the meadow was to be mowed once in autumn, so that the plants could bear seeds and scatter them. Whether by heedless haste or on purpose, municipal services mowed it barely a month after it was presented (it was determined who was responsible). They did it twice, just to be sure (Dłużewska 2016).

## Conclusions

The garden has always been a cultural text, and it is not without a reason that it lends its very name to volumes of poetry (such as *The Garden of Epigrams* by Wacław Potocki). The phenomenon of the household garden, etymologically an “enclosure” (cut off from the wilderness), is intrinsically similar to a zoological garden. Both animals and plants live in these peculiar spaces under the very special care of humans. In both cases, exotic and rare species are preferred, while the common and “meagre” ones are excluded; in these gardens the life of plants and animals is subordinated to eugenic projects. In either case, non-human subjects are anthropomorphized on the one hand and serve human entertainment on the other. The surroundings of the non-human beings are shaped by the human hand and isolated from the impact of nature (cages, pavilions,<sup>12</sup> pens, lawns, flowerbeds, and pergolas). These two garden models were subjected to a test in the course of the dramatic historical events of the twentieth century.

<sup>10</sup> In 2017, state authorities refused to participate in the commemoration of those events, which had been prepared by communities and organizations of Ukrainians and Lemkos.

<sup>11</sup> *Weeds* was a cause for dissatisfaction among nationalists; see e.g. the unsigned article *Sztuka żydowska — CHWASTY — na śmietnik*, *Wierni Polsce Suwerennej*, <https://wiernipolsce1.wordpress.com/2016/08/04/sztuka-zydowska-chwasty-na-smietnik>, August 4, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> *New Architecture of the London Zoo*, a 1938 film by László Moholy-Nagy splendidly illustrates the relationship between modernist architecture and the animal world; apparently, animal behavior would change as a result of architectural designs and devices implemented by modernists.

In 2012, Éric Baratay called for the introduction of another historical counter-narrative, in which the perspectives of animals would be taken into account. As Baratay wrote, the animal facet of history is likewise epic, turbulent, laden with contrasts, often bloody, at times serene and not infrequently comical. It has been written down with flesh and blood, with sensations and emotions, with fear, pain and pleasure, with the violence suffered and complicity shared. Its direct influence on the human is so extensive that human history is shaped thereby to an ever-increasing degree. Hence it is by no means anecdotal or secondary, and thoroughly deserves attention of historians who set a great store by history in all its complexity and diversity. One should liberate history from anthropocentric vision, take note of human companions, other living beings — animals, go over to their side, see things from their standpoint, reversing the questions, searching for more eloquent documents, rereading those we have differently, thus decentralising the narrative. (Baratay 2014)

Works originating in the milieu of animal studies or anthropozoology have very promptly addressed that gap and proceed to fill it, as they arduously seek to separate human history of animals from animal history.

Things stand somewhat differently with plant history. In 2009, Eduardo Kac's *Edunia* was presented for the first time (Kac 2010, Bakke 2011). That art project embarked on the "overlooked" kinship between humans and plants on the molecular level. Still, questions concerning the impact of plants on the history of human beings and the ramifications of historical events they are subject to are only now becoming a challenge to contemporary ethnobotany. This may be the reason why successive species of plants that humanity considers useless disappear at a frightening pace in the wake of current political and economic processes. Perhaps the hope of plants lies solely with the superweeds,<sup>13</sup> vegetal superheroes which had already been predicted in the theory of evolution?

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<sup>13</sup> Plants which, due to spontaneous mutations or crossbreeding with GMO species, have become resistant to herbicides.

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# Symbolic “Iconic Sites” vs. “Quotidian Worlds”—Industrial Landscapes in 1960s Polish Cinema

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## Abstract:

This paper examines industrial landscapes in Polish Cinema in the 60s. Upper Silesian scenery is considered not as a mere background but an essential element that constructs the cinematographic narration. Historic, economic, and socio-cultural context is brought up to draw attention to the propagandizing role of cinema in the 60s. The category of “iconic sites” proposed by Tim Edensor is introduced to analyze cinematographic depictions of Upper Silesia. Movies show the processes of industrialization framed by the strict artistic rules proposed by the Polish People Republic’s officials. The analyzed examples show the adoption of a distanced outsider’s perspective that is based on geographical and cultural orientation points. The propaganda images seen as “iconic sites” are confronted with another interpretative category proposed by Edensor, “quotidian worlds,” constituted by products of grassroots practices, focused on capturing the space of everyday experiences (surroundings) from the perspective of a citizen.

## Keywords:

industrial landscape, Upper Silesia, Polish cinema, iconic sties, quotidian worlds

Industrial landscape is a specific type of cultural landscape—processed as a result of conscious human activity, strongly marked by its interference. Geographers as characteristic features of this type of landscape classify occurrences of “densely built-up areas with its typical industrial architecture: presence of high chimneys and/or hoisting towers and mine shafts, large-scale production halls, cooling systems, blast furnaces and coking plant facilities, slagheaps” (Chmielewski, Myga-Piątek, and Solon 2015, 398). This type of material topography implies ambivalent attitudes towards landscapes, which are perceived as full of contradictions, on the one hand progressive, modern, arousing admiration, and on the other hand

deformed, devastated, human and inhuman at the same time. It constitutes the quintessence of modern human dreams of ruling the world, remaining at the same time a symbol of dehumanization, a collapse of faith in civilization's development and loss of confidence in the ability to conduct a rational co-existence of nature and culture on Earth. Polysemy, indicating a multiplicity of meanings and different directions of interpretation, makes the industrial landscape an attractive object of exploration via art. The popularity of this motive results from the observation mentioned above, especially in visual and audio-visual arts from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (lithography, painting, photography, films).

In Poland—just like in most countries of the so-called Eastern Bloc and somewhat differently than was the case in Western European countries, which were characterized by different dynamics of industrial activity (Kaliński 1995, 161)—industrialization reached its peak in the years following World War II. The country, which in the pre-war period based its economy on agriculture, began working through an intensive transformation, changing into an industrial country. The aspirations of communist authorities are reflected in the rhetoric used in the subsequent socialistic plans of economic development. This narration was summed up by Wojciech Musiał, who wrote that the Six-Year Plan was the first one entirely implemented in Poland within the frame of centrally planned economy. The economic and social restructuring specified in the Six-Year Plan were dictated by a general doctrine, where both components were inseparably linked together—social revolution became a part of industrialization. As Musiał puts it, in different words, a state industry became a base of systemic changes (Musiał 2013, 196). The greatest intensity of industrialization, connected with the location of resource deposits, occurred in Upper Silesia. In a relatively short time, this region became a true “Eldorado” attracting a large group of workers from the whole country searching for jobs in the emerging new foundries, mines, and factories. As a result of the intensified migration, as well as industrial development and intensive urbanization, Upper Silesia had undergone thorough changes of material (landscape transformations due to development of new industrial and housing facilities) and socio-cultural nature (confrontation of languages, behavior patterns, culture). Thus, it became an exemplary model of a place developed in pursuit of “a better future” according to the spirit of socialist ideology.

The subjects of interest in this article are Polish films from the 60s with Upper Silesia in the background. The visualization of the industrial landscape, however, is not limited to the scenery for the narrative; rather, it is an essential element that significantly influences the character of these works. Tadeusz Lubelski, who wrote about Polish cinema from the 60s and its socio-cultural contexts, referred to the ambiguity of this period. On the one hand, the Gomułka era is characterized by dogmatism, “a strong-arm government,” ubiquitous “ugliness, mistrust and constant surveillance” (Lubelski 2009, 235). On the other hand, it is an era of relative peace

(stagnation described as "our little stability"). Accordingly, film makers, facing the need to produce works that would fit into the current doctrine, could at the same time benefit from moderate freedom—"the margin of freedom" (Lubelski, 2009, 236)—which was brought about in artistic life after October 1956. In the cinematography of the 60s, I try to detect the works which deliberately, although in many different ways, use the forms characteristic of industrial landscapes.

## 'Iconic Sites'

Relations between geography and socio-cultural space are of paramount importance in forming a collective identity. Landscapes always constitute a reflection of social, economic, and cultural identities, being at the same time an expression of the ideological priorities of the privileged layers of society. While analyzing the industrial landscapes of Great Britain, Paul Belford stated that they evoke "an important part of the iconography of new English identity" (2009, 30), "an identity focused on industrial production and global exportation" (2009, 21). According to the researcher, the industrial landscape, developing in England approximately since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was deliberately engaged in the creation of a new society—a community oriented toward industrial activities. The gradual departure from the old world and the creation of a new one in the spirit of modernization had its spatial dimension and entailed the need to create modern places. Belford mentioned the English industrial magnates (such as Brookes of Coalbrookdale) interested in developing new industrial "ideal places" (Belford 2009, 30), being a visible sign of incoming capitalist relations of production. In the industrial landscape of the Polish People's Republic in the 60s—similarly—the realization of a new vision can be seen; however, in this case it is related to the introduction of a communist regime into Polish reality. More precisely, it was aiming at implementing the idea of merging the social and national doctrine. On the one hand, it meant strengthening the mono-ethnic structures of the country and confirming the borders established shortly after the war. To serve that goal, the visual emphasis was put on the cultural and historical elements in space. They were maintaining the mythical continuity of, for example, pro-Polish attitudes of pre-war Silesian workers or the immemorial Polish identity of so-called "Regained Lands." On the other hand, efforts were made to promote the vision of society embodied by the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the industrial landscape was simply ideal for achieving this aim through its implications concerning employment relationship, oppression of the workers, and the class conflict.

According to Tim Edensor, a unique national topography/geography each time strengthens lively presence in the landscape of the "iconic sites" (Edensor 2002, 45), understood as "sacred centres," "points of physical and ideological orientation" around which "circuits of memory" are often organized (Edensor 2002, 45). These

places operate with symbols, constituted by “highly selective, synecdochal features which are held to embody specific kinds of characteristics” (Edensor 2002, 45). They are like monuments referring to the (glorious) past, and “they also frequently celebrate the modernity of the nation, are symbols of its progress” (Edensor 2002, 45). Their production, supervised by the country, normally demonstrates the adoption of a distanced outsider’s perspective akin to “being in relation with the landscape” (Frydryczak 2013, 51)—that is, searching for geographical and cultural (view) points of orientation according to the ideological key. As such, it is a synthesis of ideas and universal values—national elements of the official culture. In this case, the role of the landscape is particularly privileged; it is perceived as a reservoir of iconic signs, which can be easily transformed into clear national symbols.

The industrial landscape immortalized in cinematography provided Polish audiences with numerous “iconic sites.” They were fulfilling the requirements defined by the resolutions of the Secretariat of the Central Committee concerning cinematography. The Central Committee proclaimed that cinema should reflect the subject matter of contemporary life characterized by truth and realism: subject matter featuring factual social, interpersonal, moral, and political conflicts the solutions to which favor socialism (Uchwała Sekretariatu KC 1994, 31). Moreover, it was perfectly suited to the demands of the cultural policy stipulated by the Second General Assembly of the governing Polish United Workers’ Party in 1954. The following goals for art (film art included) were listed: art should perform a canvassing function and develop socialist awareness. Mariola Jankun-Dopartowa commented that optimism and communicativeness were set as the main features of a valuable artwork; moreover, art was supposed to be realistic in form and to have socialist meaning (Jankun-Dopartowa 2007, 111). The industrial landscape on the silver-screen was perfectly tailored to fulfill these functions. One of the most significant “iconic sites” in Polish cinematography was an industrial plant defined as an environment filled with the idea of progress. The most significant example from this period is *Gorąca Linia* (*Hotline*) directed by Wanda Jakubowska in 1965—the film, due to its theme and the perspective used to carry the narration, can be identified as neo-productive. Its theme is, generally speaking, a construction site featuring conditions found in new socialist mines. Engineer Karol Przybora arrives with a particular task in the industrial district. He is supposed to build a thriving plant in six years (which was in accordance with the concept of economic planning in the Polish People’s Republic at the time). Thanks to his engagement, accountability, and especially his impeccable ideological image, he manages to do the task. What is more, he also succeeds thanks to being more than an office bound director; he succeeds by being a real activist and companion at work. The engineer does not hesitate to go down with miners in dangerous areas of the mine underground and monitor the progress of construction works. This practice leads him to discover a critical oversight that threatens both the local community and the stability of the

whole social policy. The film shows mining in the region as a dangerous activity that relies on pre-existing (German) infrastructure characterized by outdated capitalist technologies and irrational management rules. An additional danger threatening the endeavor came in the form of hostile class elements embedded in the community, which stubbornly sought to undercut the socialist regime. Supporters of the old political set-up and representatives of private initiatives belonged to this group of official enemies. The new plant enthusiastically built by Przybora was supposed to, contrary to former capitalist relations, gather a community saturated with a spirit of cooperation and "healthy" competition. To emphasize this in the visual plan of the film, a rule was applied according to which modernity was ennobled. Everything that is old, German, capitalist is depicted as backward and defective, whereas those coming into being—such as newly built production facilities and infrastructure—are presented as bright, clean, and automated. Another issue associated with industrial plants is migration. In the movie entitled *Obok prawdy* (*Beside the Truth*) directed by Janusz Weychert in 1964, the landscape of a mine is focused in on the figures of workers, who arrive from different parts of Poland (especially from the countryside) to Silesia—the region of new economic opportunities. Migrants were brought in by attractive earnings and opportunity for social mobility (mining and metallurgy was considered lucrative and future-oriented), but also a thirst for adventure and change of lifestyle. What is important here is that in feature films depicting the mine as an "iconic site" (unlike in documentaries such as *Rok Franka W.* (*The Year of Frank W.*), directed by Kazimierz Karabasz in 1967) they do not go into details in terms of the fate of newcomers, their emotions, motivations, or the complicated assimilation processes they face in their new environment. Instead, spectacular events with protagonists taking part are accentuated, as a result these movies emphasize significant social issues. This can be observed in the film *Obok prawdy* mentioned above, in which the camera is focused on the issue of an accident in the mine that happens because of a thoughtless, underqualified young worker and archaic technology. The message of the film is that only improving the people's education and morality along with the process of equipment modernization can guarantee the success of Polish socialist industry. The factory and its surroundings in the film constitute "iconic sites" because they also have conflict-generating potential and convey an assumption that is essential to communist doctrine—namely, that an indispensable factor of social development is the class struggle. The depicted conflict concerned the situation at the time. The system, in which members of the socialist community must be alert and on time, undermines the bad intentions of concealed enemies of the people (for example, as in the film *Gorąca linia*). Equally often, however, the conflict is formulated in historic terms (from the inter-war period) as a struggle of the Silesian (Polish) working class with western (especially German) capitalists—the owners of the local foundries and mines. That final issue enables us to

harmoniously integrate the social and national narratives and to show the meaning of the class struggle as well as the battle for Silesia to be Polish. In this respect, the films entitled *Czarne skrzydła* (*Black Wings*) directed by Ewa and Czesław Petelscy in 1962 or *Rodzina Milcarków* (*The Milcarek Family*) directed by Józef Wyszomirski in 1962 are representative. The mining slagheaps and housing estates contrasting with the palaces of the former capitalist owners constitute an area of impoverished existence for Poles, who, in conditions of class humiliation, were taking up the heroic battle for national liberation. In this context, good Silesians (workers and citizens) are recognized as those who always actively support a Polish identity, and bad ones are identified as all those who were in favor of German nationality. This simplified version of Polish-German conflict became a dramaturgic axis even for the widely recognized film directed by Kazimierz Kutz entitled *Sól ziemi czarnej* (*The Salt of Black Earth*) (1969), said to be the most outstanding example of Silesian cinema.

### ‘Quotidian worlds’

“Iconic sites” are distinguished by their ideological aspect, which makes them of symbolic and permanent value, significant but idealized reference-points for identity. The everyday experience of people beyond these sites is somewhat different. On the basis of this distinction we can come to the conclusion that “iconic sites” and “quotidian worlds” are unambiguously antinomial terms. The thesis presented by Edensor, however, is based on a different conviction. According to the researcher, within familiar, homely spaces dominated by habitual practice, we create more than merely familiar and local bonds. These places can be foundational for national identity, however, on the basis of other non-hierarchical rules (Edensor 2002, 50). Living space—according to Gaston Bachelard—is mostly associated with home and neighborhood areas, as “home is most affectively charged through the way it is sensually apprehended, producing a kinaesthetic experience of place which is embedded in memory” (Bachelard 1994, 3-4). Individual, affective spaces belong to different geographical scales, however, if treated jointly, they can take part in the creation of national identity. This identity must be understood as a process, like a trend of continuous restoration and reproduction, having numerous dimensions and being marked by a density of links. Its essence lays in intertextuality and production of meanings. For in this entire “imagined, internally complex national geography” (Edensor 2002, 66), as defined by Edensor, different localities and private spaces are working together. Both of them overlap each other.

However, “quotidian worlds,” just as “iconic sites” are endowed with a kind of potential for consolidating that which is national, determine definitely separate perspective of inspection of reality. It can be defined as grassroots involvement in a familiar space, participation or “being in a landscape” (Frydryczak 2013, 9).

A different understanding of space presented by film-makers corresponds to that. First of all, instead of a view that is impersonal and abstracted from the context, there is a specific "neighbourhood" (Frydryczak 2013, 192) displayed on the screen—an anthropological place, a space for living, experiencing, and preserving cultural practices endowed with a specific local color. The industrial landscape becomes a display of local knowledge, which throws doubts on the possibility of ideologically controlling the space and can be easily distinguished in a *longue durée* perspective. Suitable for that framework of perception that undertakes the attempt of expressing individuals, local point of view, in a sense, independent of doctrinal orders, becomes possible in Polish cinema in situation of moderate (in comparison to period of socialist realism) creative freedom, which has brought about after 1956. The growing tendency of documenting everyday life, using in film practices an objective grassroots approach, enabling to observe life, is visible to a lesser degree in feature films and more so in documentaries, and also in the field of amateur cinema that was developing in Silesia thanks to numerous amateur film clubs arising next to the mines and factories.

One of a few feature films, a work that breaks down the schematic vision of the mine—the space of crystalizing class and mining awareness—collective body engaged in implementing the exploitation plant is the picture directed by Paweł Komorowski entitled *Pięciu* (*Five*) from 1964. However, the background of the narrative constituted here—like in *Obok prawdy*—by a catastrophe in a mine, has quite a different distribution of feature elements. The film-makers are not interested in the accident itself and the issues related to responsibility and bureaucracy, but the catastrophe grasped in the context of its existential dimension, understood as a liminal point of mining experience. The scene where people are waiting for rescue becomes an impulse for initiating the processes of anamnesis, in which the audience is confronted with the protagonists' experiences of breakthrough significance (in terms of life experience), that embodies the whole complexity of the condition of the Silesian borderland. Thanks to that, a broad cross-section of Upper Silesians' fates in the 20<sup>th</sup> century emerges before the eyes of the audience (Lewandowski 2012, 40). Among them there are images from the Second World War, which deviate significantly from well-known visions showed in other Polish war films from this period. They reveal the Silesian "otherness" of fates, including such experiences as a substitution of German uniforms with Polish ones by the Silesians at Monte Cassino or the fratricidal struggle of autochthons, fighting in two opposing armies (Polish and German). The attempt to deepen the problematic themes of the war and to show its drama from the perspective of the borderland demonstrates the director's thorough knowledge about the local history and culture.

An impression of "being in the landscape" in the film *Pięciu* is strengthened by fact that the protagonists speak in a dialect and the whole presented world is



marked by local Silesian color. The work experience that is essential for locality is not only a superficial activity, but constitutes a non-transferable link for native tradition and ethos. A similar attitude towards work can be found in the amateur productions of Leon Wojtala,<sup>1</sup> especially in such films as *Gorzki chleb* (*Bitter Bread*) (1960) or *Dni bez słońca* (*Days without Sun*) (1969). The “QuotidianWorld” of industry captured by the last director is not depicted as a space infused by a socialist apotheosis of work but the everyday struggle of local people, who, regardless of political and systemic conditions, must work (often work in excess), struggling with the archaic systems of production and a lack of oversight concerning occupational health and safety rules. The subsequent films directed by Wojtala—for example, the one produced most likely in the early 70s entitled *Ginący świat* (*Dying World*)—are more pessimistic with a suggestive vision of the destruction of the local world as a result of the influence of ecological disaster caused by industrialization and the excessive exploitation of natural resources.

The aforementioned works indicate that a necessary condition for a film to capture “quotidian worlds” is to adopt a perspective “from the inside,” which was successfully done by film-makers from the region and/or bound up with it mentally. In this context it is also worth mentioning two other films from the 60s: footage directed by Janusz Kidawa, *Haldy* (*Slagheaps*) (1962) and a short film produced as a school etude by Antoni Halor named *Pożegnanie kolejki* (*Farewell to the Narrow-gauge Railway*) (1968). One vision of world emerges from both pictures, formed by way of the coexistence of nature and industry. What can be striking in Halor’s film is the natural landscape of fields and meadows adorned with red poppies that smoothly change into a prairie landscape thanks to the slagheaps, which resemble the sun-burned rocks of the Grand Canyon. All these associations are complemented by an old steam engine blasting into infinite space. It is only the hoisting shafts visible on the horizon, captured from time to time, that remind one that it is not the scenery of the West, but a natural Upper Silesian area. In Kidawa’s film, the industrial landscape is definitely more prominent. Here, it sublimates due to its romantic images. The radiance of the afternoon sun makes the captured objects tender, as a result of that the titular slagheaps do not seem to be tarry and black but brown-orange, and the whole landscape acquires features of exotic beauty. Generally, the landscape depicted in the above-mentioned works shows that the environments of industry and humanity are not mutually exclusive, and the crucial element of identity is the approval of centuries-old industrial tradition. The sense of identity is strengthened by the nature’s capacity for self-renewal. On the slagheaps and in the fallows sprout up clean, white flowers—a sign of natural phenomena unique to the region and a symbol of transformative phenomena on

<sup>1</sup> This author was a member of the legendary “Śląsk” (Silesia) amateur film club in Katowice, later in ZZK “Maczki” Klub, and at the end, from the 70s, a member of Mikołowski “iks.”



a larger scale, related to the long-term process of nature and human beings adapting to industrial conditions.

The feature that the discussed movies share is the emotional relationship of the film-makers to the depicted place, which, according to Heidegger, is the place of "being." The industrial landscape that fills the frames, on the one hand, is treated as domesticated and authentic space, and on the other hand, awakening feelings of concern and fear. This is particularly visible in Kidawa's film, in which the place is presented as full of ambivalences: domesticated and worrying, friendly and at the same time overwhelmed by the element against which a human must measure their strength in everyday experience. Fascination with coal slopes, both aesthetic and anthropological ("mountains" piled up by human hands), is accompanied by horror and fear that the slagheaps are on fire, that it will grow, and possibly soon bury the housing estate. These kinds of extremes express the human mentality in the periods of increased industrialization. Halor's *Pożegnanie kolejki* unexpectedly offers a sense of nostalgia mostly associated with a completely different epoch—the post-industrial. The last journey of a narrow-gauge railway captured by the director, the so-called "bańgowska railway" that was transporting the workers of KWK Siemianowice, is an expression of fascination with the local industrial tradition; at the same time, it constitutes a document of those times, which, in the face of anticipated changes, is perceived as lost.

The other film directed by Halor, which at the turn of the 60s and 70s depicted the large-scale industrial environment from an original perspective, was footage produced with the cooperation of Józef Gębski, entitled *Czarne zielone* (*Black Green*) (1971). The film breaks down the propagandized vision of Polish mining via humorous scenes, where the recruitment and training of the candidates for miners is conducted in an atmosphere of intellectual, mental, and cultural clash. Footage captured underground shows work in a mine in a realistic way and makes the audience focus on the lack of human knowledge and practice with respect to the archaic mystery of the underground. That mode of presentation of the industrial theme was not appreciated by the authorities, and the film was soon withdrawn from screens, unlike in the case of *Rok Franka W.* which was devoted to similar themes. This excellent documentary, disclosing details about the vocational program organized in Silesia by the Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy (Voluntary Labour Corps), constituted a crucial film in the history of Polish documentaries due to the fact that it depicted the activities, intellect, and sensitivity of one protagonist (and not those of a whole community, as had been the case so far) that were not staged. However, from the perspective of the considerations central to this paper, this film proves that producing a "QuotidianWorld" through cinema is not the exclusive domain of directors from Silesia. It is a matter of film-makers taking on a specific perspective in viewing the landscape and the place—grassroots and individual. The industrial environment in the film produced by Karabasz is perceived

as everyday life for a young worker, a newcomer from a small grassroots place, immersed in a metropolitan reality that is both exciting and movingly unfamiliar; it outlines the complex problems connected with acclimatization.

## Conclusions

To sum up, the titular “iconic sites” and “quotidian worlds” embodied on the screen result from a specific point of view assumed by film-makers (distanced or engaged). The crucial characteristic of the creation process of “iconic sites” is the ideological audit, which always means reductionism; the landscape becomes a synecdoche, the exposure of the nationality pattern treated as monolith, without a local context. An “iconic site” remains a symbol of a creative act, a hierarchical creation of new identity, being a fulfillment of a specific postulated vision (Edensor 2002, 64-68). In films about Silesia, it is the vision of industrial space—synonymous with a “new” place, the calling card of a country building socialism—that results in the tendency to make history monumental and to selectively code historical phenomena (overestimating the scale of the battle for national liberation), omitting attributes of regional distinctiveness (language, cultural behavior patterns), geographical simplifications (lack of distinction between Silesia and a coalfield). This is very much unlike the case of “quotidian worlds,” which reveal local knowledge, focus attention on historical, geographical, and cultural specificities of the region, and the consequences of its variable nationalities, being within the limits of the formula of documenting the observed pre-existing reality (and not of its creating). The fact that “iconic sites” and “Quotidian world” do not have to be contradictory to each other is demonstrated in the works of Kutz, especially *Sól ziemi czarnej* from 1969 and *Perła w koronie* (*Pearl in the Crown*) from 1971. Apart from these works, it is difficult to find other examples of these two perspectives coexisting in film. More frequently, they constitute antitheses due to creating pictures of a place interpreted as an ideological short cut, monolith (“iconic site”), or filmed with the suggestion of more complicated, multidimensional tensions full of identity (“QuotidianWorld”).

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# The landscaping of Upper Silesia after 1989

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## Abstract:

The paper offers a critical analysis of the representations of post-industrial landscapes in Upper Silesia. It takes a look at the products of visual culture after 1989: feature films set in the region and photographs by Wojciech Wilczyk, trying to detect their embedded ideological mechanism and explain its dynamics. Drawing on the concepts advanced by Tim Edensor and W.J.T. Mitchell, the paper demonstrates that that mechanism consists in using aestheticization tools and sight cropping, following which a comprehensive view is feigned. As a result, Upper Silesia appears to be a degenerate space affected by permanent stagnation. In closing, the requirements that representations of landscape should meet are enumerated in order to provide insights into the diversity of a region, as well as offering a point of departure for reflection on its place in the national imagination. Ultimately, these considerations enable the expression of Upper Silesian identity from a position other than that of inferiority and subordination.

## Key words:

landscape, ruin, Upper Silesia, Silesian film, post-industrial areas

“Is landscape the world we are living *in*, or a scene we are looking *at*, from afar?” (Wylie 2007, 1), John Wylie wondered in the introduction to a book which offered a synthetic overview of positions and discussions concerning the category of landscape in contemporary cultural studies. At the same time, the researcher drew attention to one of the core tensions which have accompanied landscape studies since they emerged as an autonomous field of inquiry. The existing definitions of landscape are spread along an axis spanning two extremes: “Environment, space (area), nature, even reality and the thing itself are one side of the opposition; the other comprises notion, perception, phenomenon, representation, image (landscape)” (Zaremba 2014b), as Łukasz Zaremba recapitulated, demonstrating, following Mateusz Salwa, that attempts to reconcile those seemingly incongruent standpoints tend to have fairly unfortunate outcomes, entailing the risk of losing the analytical potential of the term, as in the case of the legislative definition

contained in the European Landscape Convention, where landscape is an “area, as perceived by people,” in other words everything that surrounds us (Zaremba 2014b, 7-8). Authors of theoretical interdisciplinary approaches try to circumvent such pitfalls, formulating their descriptions of landscape in such a way that it does not overlap at any point with the above opposition and simultaneously highlights the specificity of the phenomenon it seeks to encapsulate.<sup>1</sup>

Even though this text does not aspire to redefine the category of landscape, reference to the above dilemma is not irrelevant, as it enables me to situate the cited case studies against the backdrop of approaches adopted in current research. In my analysis, I will be looking at cinematographic and photographic representations of Upper Silesia, which suggests greater affinity with the “visual” pole of the contradiction, although the representations will provide, to some degree, a negative frame of reference; I would like to examine them critically and consider the ideological mechanisms that they enact. I am primarily interested in depictions created after 1989, as in my opinion the date marks a turning point in perceptions of the region. Before 1989, Upper Silesia was seen more as a resource, its value calculated in the tons of coal that could be mined. In the wake of political and economic changes after 1989, the previously predominant *land* of Upper Silesia lost the utility value it had had, but its exchange value is still there: the capacity to participate in the exchange of ideas and cultural communication, enabling it to be revealed as a *landscape*.<sup>2</sup> It is not without significance that the monolithic vision of the nation, hitherto propagated by the authorities of the Polish People’s Republic, began to crumble gradually, at least to such an extent that regional difference can be articulated and confronted. Hence reflection on the representation of Upper Silesian space after 1989 appears to be an interesting issue for inquiry, as I believe that culturally shaped modes of perceiving landscapes have a direct impact on how we function in an environment or, in other words, the ways in which we tend to organize the visual field have their material outcomes in the formation of collective and individual identities.

## 1.

In the final, climactic scenes of Michał Rosa’s 2006 *Co słonko widziało* (*What the Sun Has Seen*) the paths of three protagonists which until then have been followed separately finally converge. Sebastian, Marta, and Józef, all compelled to raise an

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<sup>1</sup> In Poland, particularly interesting conclusions in that respect have been drawn by Beata Frydryczak (2013) and Mateusz Salwa (2014, 43-54).

<sup>2</sup> The difference between landscape and land was discussed by W. J.T. Mitchell: “The land, real property, contains a limited quantity of wealth in minerals, vegetation, water, and dwelling space. Dig out all the gold in a mountainside, and its wealth is exhausted. But how many photographs, postcards, paintings, and awestruck ‘sightings’ of the Grand Canyon will it take to exhaust its value as a landscape?” (2002b, 15).

amount of money beyond their reach in a short amount of time, meet accidentally to see the demolition of a giant chimney, a part of a disused factory which, next to the dense housing of Upper Silesian towns, had thus far provided a background to people's struggle with their grim realities. The spectacular blowing-up of the post-industrial ruins acquires a symbolic dimension and may be interpreted as a harbinger of change in the lives of the protagonists, which consists in accepting the obstacles they have to face. The demolition of the factory chimney, a legacy of the region's past, hints at the possibility of a new beginning, at least in the individual lives of the characters who inhabit it. The disposal of the industrial heritage brings hope of turning over a new leaf.

*Co słonko widziało* is Rosa's second "Silesian" film. His 1993 television film entitled *Gorący czwartek* (*Hot Thursday*), which won him Bronze Lions for the best debut at the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia, also tells a story set thoroughly in the depressing mundanity of young inhabitants in a post-industrial city. The three protagonists are teenage Adam, Siwy, and Dworaczek, all from a poor, working-class background. The boys strive to improve their lot, but they do not always opt for lawful means of doing so. One day, they steal a number of petty items from a car parked near a mine. The theft enables them to experience brief moments of joy, but ultimately leads to problems and disappointments. In his study of Silesian cinema, Jan F. Lewandowski noted that by setting *Gorący czwartek* in a region ravaged by industrial exploitation and using recurring, vivid shots of the protagonists against the background of the deformed Upper Silesian landscape with its miners' houses and slag heaps, Rosa initiated a certain trend. Lewandowski observed in the introduction to his book that many authors followed it, telling all kinds of stories in the degraded Upper Silesian scenery. He noticed that some took the bleak convention to the extremes (Lewandowski 2012, 13).

Although at first the researcher did not elaborate on the observation and refrained from mentioning the names of the directors in question, it is not difficult to identify which motion pictures he might have had in mind, especially given that they were included on his list of region-themed films spanning the period from 1920 to 2011. The first decade of the 21st century saw plenty of productions set in the distinctively visible scenery of Upper Silesia, which addressed the most topical social and economic themes at the time. In this context, one should cite such features as *Oda do radości* (*Ode to Joy*) directed by Anna Kazejak, Jan Komasa, and Maciej Migas in 2005, with particular emphasis on *Śląsk* (*Silesia*), the short made by Kazejak; *Z odzysku* (*Retrieval*) directed by Sławomir Fabicki in 2006; *Moje Miasto* (*My Town*) directed by Marek Lechki in 2007; *Ewa* (*Eve*) directed by Adam Sikora and Ingmar Villqist in 2010; or *Benek* directed by Robert Gliński in 2007. The films usually bear the hallmarks of two genre conventions: social drama or tragicomedy. The post-transformation landscapes of the region, grimy and ugly, serve as both a setting and a complement to the fates of characters who, more often than not,

are burdened by determinism and head towards disaster rather than culminating in a happy end. In the social dramas, Upper Silesian landscapes endow the stories with an even more depressing quality and exacerbate the sense of alienation of individuals, while the cinematic world around appears dehumanized (as in a scene in *Ewa* showing the protagonist, Giza, come back home through the fog-enveloped, deserted streets of a workers' colony after she fell victim to a violent assault). In the tragicomedies, landscapes may generate humor (for instance in *Benek*, whose protagonists set up a makeshift private mine and call it *Coal Valley*). Grzegorz Lewandowski's 2006 thriller *Hiena* (*Hyena*) is an exception in that respect. The scenery of disused mines, illegal coal pits, and workers' housing estates was used there as a means of artistic expression, with which the director sought to build an atmosphere of dread. However, regardless of the genre standards on which the films set in Upper Silesia draw, the leitmotiv remains the same: themes of unemployment, poverty, resultant frustration, or lack of perspectives for a better future. After her husband is laid off from the mine and suffers an accident while mining illegally, *Eve's* Giza decides to work at an escort agency to improve the family's dire situation. The protagonist of *Benek*, also a former miner, tries to find employment as a seasonal worker, butcher, even a male prostitute, but he is turned down everywhere. The family of the boy in *Hiena* sinks into poverty when his father dies in a mining disaster. One could even hazard the claim that motion pictures which appear to subscribe to the trend inaugurated by Rosa's *Gorący czwartek* have played a role in consolidating conventional iconography of the aforementioned social-economic issues, as well as established a repertoire of iconic representations of the region.

## 2.

The role of popular culture and the film industry in reproducing certain iconic, particularly privileged types of landscape was discussed by Tim Edensor in his *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (2002). He focused on rural landscapes, which in his opinion constitute a universally intelligible "selective shorthand" with respect to the nations which inhabit it: "Ireland has become synonymous with its West Coast .... Argentina is inevitably linked with images of the pampas .... Morocco is associated with palm trees, oases and shapely dunes, and the Netherlands with a flat patchwork of polders and drainage ditches. Of course, the deserts, swamps and mountains of Argentina tend to be overlooked, as do the highlands of Morocco and Holland" (Edensor 2002, 39).

If one attempted to identify that kind of representative space with a powerful symbolic and affective load in Poland, then such icons of Polishness as wayside crosses, fields of corn, haystacks, and sacred or manorial architecture would undoubtedly have to be considered. These were immortalized in a series of guides entitled *Cuda*



*Polski (Wonders of Poland)* by Jan Bułhak, the originator of the concept of “home-land photography,” which took handfuls of inspiration from Romantic literature and landscape painting (e.g., Ferdynand Ruszczyc) (Rybicka 2015, 13-30). According to Edensor, sights of that type, constructed on the basis of synecdoche, are a conduit for and assure the continuity of a conservative version of national identity, where the rusticity of landscape “most frequently encapsulates the *genius loci* of the nation, the place from which we have sprung, where our essential national spirit resides” (Edensor 2002, 40). Thus, rural landscapes stem from national landscape ideologies which strive to create a space purified of all visual signs of strangeness or otherness. That which is different—persons, traces in architecture, cult sites, manifestations of modernity—fluctuates between hypervisibility and invisibility, Edensor argues. Set against a representative rural landscape, it is flagrantly “out of place” and therefore tends to be omitted in official presentations of national geography, vanishing from sight in a sense.

In light of Edensor’s concept, the post-industrial landscapes of Upper Silesia—antithetical to ruralness and an embodiment of the otherness eschewed by national ideology—should either remain invisible or pose an apparent threat to the hegemonic vision of the Polish landscape. Still, one can hardly assert that the post-transformation depictions of the region are to be found on the margins of visibility, if they are so readily reproduced via popular culture, or that they harbor any grassroots subversive potential, since they do not demand revision of the most iconic and representative form of the national landscape. It would therefore seem legitimate to claim that the case of Upper Silesia exposes a blind spot in Edensor’s theory, demonstrating that in spite of his premises the ascendancy of landscape does not consist in omitting those types of spaces which do not meet the requirements of “purified” space, in pushing them to the sidelines, introducing censorship, or prohibiting one from looking at them. On the contrary, they are made visible albeit in a particular, regulated manner which in certain respects bears paradoxical resemblance to Edensor’s mechanism of “selective shorthand,” but it does not come down to that. For a closer examination of the process that yields the Upper Silesian landscape, one should employ more suitable tools—namely, those provided by the concepts of W.J.T. Mitchell.

### 3.

In the introductory chapter to the collective monograph entitled *Landscape and Power* (2002), Mitchell underlined that the notion of landscape should be conceived of as a verb rather than a noun: instead of speaking exclusively of “landscape,” as an object, one should also discuss it as a process. The researcher was interested in “ask[ing] not just what landscape ‘is’ or ‘means’ but what it *does*, how it works as a cultural practice” (Mitchell 2002a, 1). Such an approach implies relinquishing

the conviction that landscape can be defined only through reference to the genre of modern European painting or a particular specimen of the genre. Mitchell prefers to describe it in the categories of medium, which affects the shape of particular specimens, being reciprocally influenced and molded by such specimens. Construed as a medium, landscape also functions as an intermediary in communication or exchange of various meanings and values whilst being their material vehicle; it is a reservoir of symbolic forms, which may be quoted or transformed in order to convey particular meanings (Mitchell 2002b, 14-15).

Drawing on Mitchell's idea, I would like to describe "landscaping"<sup>3</sup> as a mode of looking which, utilizing aestheticization, isolates a fragment of reality and shapes it into a pretense of completeness, framing views in such a way that at first glance nothing seems missing or, to use Edensor's language, operates through synecdoche to effect a "selective shorthand." In the case of Upper Silesian landscapes, the frame mainly comprises the spaces of abandoned mines, the headframes, the slag heaps, the dilapidated walls of houses, or the chimneys and crumbling structures of defunct factories, in short the derelict elements of post-industrial architecture which, by virtue of *pars pro toto*, begin to stand for the entire region. Following the analysis of such films as *Gorący czwartek* or *Co słońko widziało*, as well as other pictures which iterate the manner seen first in Rosa's film, one can also conclude that the sights of Upper Silesia are simultaneously encumbered with negatively connoted symbolic meanings, persistently signifying a conglomerate of facts and contents that could be branded with a joint label of "adverse aftermath of economic transformation." The effect is generated via a mechanism resembling metonymy as the meaning of landscape is constituted based on the rule of contiguity: Post-industrial ruins become signs of degradation and poverty resulting from the transformation, because the stories unfolding in that setting are concerned precisely with such issues.

According to Mitchell, landscapes camouflage exclusions and afford an ostensibly objective point of view. The views captured are naturalized and therefore seem "given" and "inevitable." Thus, inquiry into the substance and the form of each creation that exploits the medium of landscape should be accompanied by consideration of the mode and function of their cultural impact. Having applied the procedure in the analysis of Upper Silesian landscapes, it turns out that their representations in film render the space of the region homogeneous and preclude its diversity (natural, architectural, or cultural) from being seen. What is more, landscaping becomes a figure of the gaze that projects otherness and backwardness,

3 Although Mitchell underlines that the notion of landscape should be conceived of as a verb and discussed as a process, he doesn't use the word "landscaping" himself. Nevertheless, in this paper I would like to take his suggestion very literally and apply that term here. In English "landscaping" refers primarily to landscape design and signifies an action of modifying the visible features of an area of land, such as plants or landforms. I believe that the superficiality and anesthetization it connotes strongly correspond with the nature of the mechanisms that are being discussed in the article.

thus reinforcing the image of Upper Silesia as a place which suffered particular harm during the economic shift from centrally planned economy to free market economy and now remains stuck in permanent stagnation. As it follows from my deliberations so far, works of film art do contribute to the consolidation of that image, which among other things is bolstered by their narrative characteristics, but I believe that photography plays an equally important role in that process. Post-industrial landscapes have become an object of interest for such artists as Michał Cała, Arkadiusz Gola, and Piotr Szymon, but I would like to take a closer look at the photographs by Wojciech Wilczyk, collected in the series *Czarno-biały Śląsk* (*Black and White Silesia*), which is likely to have been reproduced the most and therefore remains the most recognizable.

#### 4.

The series entitled *Czarno-biały Śląsk*, on which the artist worked from 1999 to 2003, comprises photographs which capture the advancing decay of closed mines, industrial plants as well as factory housing estates in several towns in the Upper Silesian conurbation: Bytom, Katowice, Zabrze, Chorzów, Gliwice, Ruda Śląska, and Siemianowice. The project was neither the first nor the last of Wilczyk's encounters with the region and its architecture. Previously, between 1992 and 1996, Wilczyk witnessed the dismantling of the coking plant "Walenty" in Ruda Śląska (*Pejzaż Symboliczny* [*Symbolic Landscape*]) and from 2003 to 2006 documented the ruins of inactive industrial facilities in Poland and Germany (*Postindustrial*). The latter title was used for the exhibition held in 2004 at the Zderzak Gallery in Kraków, which showed images from *Black and White Silesia*. An album was published to accompany the show, featuring 89 photographs and essays by Andrzej Stasiuk, Wojciech Wilczyk, and Marek Grygiel (Wilczyk 2004). In my analysis, I will refer to the photographs in that very album.

Wilczyk admits that when developing *Czarno-biały Śląsk* as well as during his earlier project at the "Walenty" coking plant he was not aware of the oeuvre of Bernd and Hilla Becher, representatives of the Düsseldorf school of photography (Wilczyk 2013, 34-37), but situating his work in the context of their achievement seems nonetheless warranted. However, what they have in common is not their "taxonomic" approach intended to capture seriality, but Wilczyk's characteristic fascination—apparently shared with the authors of *Typologies of Industrial Buildings*—with architectural forms that begin to resemble "post-industrial sculptures" of concrete and steel once their demolition has started. This fascination is tangible in almost all of his photographs, but it is most conspicuous in several specific instances: the view of the carbide plant in Bobrek, a borough of Bytom; the coking plant at the "Gliwice" coal mine; or the zinc galvanizing facility at the "Silesia" metalworks in the Katowice neighborhood of Wełnowiec.

The structure of the first has been only partially demolished (or rather fell apart) at its bottom section; the upper stories have been disrupted only slightly, so the colossus stands on several steel (or ferroconcrete) legs, virtually defying the laws of physics. The coking plant in Gliwice also gives the impression of being on the brink of sinking into the abyss of the grey terrain; it leans sideways because the ground must have subsided there. Consequently, it resembles a giant cardboard box or wooden crate. In contrast, the disintegration of the zinc plant in Katowice has progressed so far that only its skeleton can be seen, a cage of steel bars, pillars and remnants of walls, which Wilczyk captured in accordance with the principles of linear perspective—with the vanishing point at the very center. The remaining photographs in the series also give the impression of a certain regularity or proportionality, as Wilczyk readily employs horizontal, symmetrical divisions in that he tries to capture reflections of the industrial features, often on the surface of puddles forming in the hollows in the ground.

Suitable framing serves to capture the architectural forms, highlighting the geometric composition of particular elements of the “post-industrial sculpture” and underscoring its monumental quality. In the essay included in the album published by Zderzak Gallery, Wilczyk often mentions looking for an apposite perspective to take his pictures (Wilczyk 2004, 11); he would come closer to and move away from the photographed feature, constantly altering the viewpoint in search of compelling frames (Wilczyk 2004, 8). However, the movement was not recorded or even signaled in any photograph, as all of them are static, immobile, with horizontal and vertical elements predominating in the composition. In an interview several years later, the artist admitted “given that a photograph crops out elements from the context, the proportions can be disrupted to some extent. My photographs ... were taken using a shift lens, which makes it possible to realign the optical axis. I would stand close to the feature and shift the lens, in other words change the proportions of the frame in a sense, thanks to which the photographed motifs appear to be more monumental than they actually are” (Wilczyk 2013, 37).

The change of proportions to which Wilczyk refers is discernible in the sets of photographs depicting a structure from several angles, as with the aforesaid coking plant at the “Gliwice” coal mine. The buildings captured in successive images are enormous, overwhelming, and therefore inhuman in a sense. On top of that, Wilczyk decided to shoot in winter and autumn, when light does not allow sharp contrasts to be brought out; it is diffused while the occasional mists add an aura of mystery and bone-chilling awe. The monochrome only boosts the effect with its halftones and a broad range of greys. If there had been some vegetation among the industrial ruins, it either remains invisible in Wilczyk’s photographs, blending in with other elements of the composition, or becomes conspicuously strange, unfriendly, and sinister. Interestingly enough, although the series is titled *Czarno-biały Śląsk*

there is little white in the photographs; even the snow and the sky seem grey and grubby.

## 5.

In his inspiring *Waste Matter — the Debris of Industrial Ruins and the Disorder of the Material World* (2005), Tim Edensor drew attention to the difference that distinguishes between historical ruins, which are tended to, often visited by tourists and, at least since the Romantic period, looked upon with a melancholic gaze, and post-industrial ruins (Edensor 2005, 323-24). In his opinion, the latter harbor a latent subversive force: being contemporary remnants of accelerated industrialization, post-industrial ruins function on the fringe of the world we inhabit and undermine the established social order sustained by a predictable and regular distribution of objects in space. They disrupt networks composed of objects, people, places, knowledge, and relations; networks that offer stability to reality. According to Edensor, post-industrial ruins resist straightforward classifications not only because existing aesthetic codes do not apply in their case, but also because their obstinate persistence invalidates clear divisions into what has already become a piece of rubbish, a wreck, or waste and what has not; the division into the material and the no-longer material, the organic and the inorganic, is anything but clear there. Abandoned and left to their own devices, the buildings of disused factories—once a domain of what is human (social, cultural)—now blur the memory of their former functions and participate in the process of hybridization, becoming increasingly interwoven with the non-human subjects which inhabit them, such as animals or plants (Edensor 2005, 320-22).

The spaces captured in Wilczyk's photographs and the ruins analyzed by Edensor are stripped of their previous meanings: their functions are no longer intelligible due to advancing disintegration, but also because their portrayal seeks to accentuate the geometric shapes of the erstwhile industrial facilities, which hampers identification of their past meaning and renders them abstract to some degree. The analogies end there, however, as the manner in which the post-industrial relics were presented in *Czarno-biały Śląsk* suppresses the subversive potential mentioned by Edensor. Wilczyk appears to side with order: the frames are carefully composed following the rules of symmetry, and buildings are consistently photographed from a distance which, in conjunction with the lack of color, causes the traces of intervention of non-human life forms into their structure to be no longer perceptible. For Wilczyk, nature not so much coalesces with the cultural, challenging this binary through hybrids, but assumes the form of a hostile force which is external to the products of culture. Its potency does not stem from vitality or exuberant creative energy but, on the contrary, from somber lifelessness that carries the threat of annihilation. Perspective also plays a substantial role in the series: the shift of the optical axis to make the structures appear particularly imposing causes them to

outgrow any human scale by virtue of their monumentality and to acquire a stately or majestic aspect. Thus, one could hardly say that the photographs in *Czarno-biały Śląsk* created an opportunity for a new aesthetic to emerge, the aesthetic postulated by Edensor, provoking speculation on such modes of interpreting, experiencing, and imagining materiality that would transcend the obvious orders of the world we inhabit, and in consequence enable different visions of arrangement of the social reality to come forth (Edensor 2005, 330). Instead, Wilczyk exploits existing codes, granting post-industrial ruins a moment of aesthetic being: he applies brooding tonalities, engenders a kind of remoteness that triggers that mysterious effect, and uses means to make the depicted landscapes look baleful, inaccessible, and mighty at the same time. In short, Wilczyk's photographs evoke the sensation of sublimity.

## 6.

Those who have embarked on interpretations of *Czarno-biały Śląsk* have often drawn attention to the documentary aspect of photographs, affirming that they represent an objective record. This conviction is conveyed in one of the essays in the album published by Zderzak Gallery, in which art historian and curator Marek Grygiel discussed Wilczyk's work using such expressions as "devoid of embellishments," "unadulterated record," and "maximum objectivity," even though he noted that each composition was meticulously planned (Grygiel 2004, 13-15). The dangers of limiting the interpretation of the series to documentary qualities have been addressed by Maria Popczyk, according to whom, by treating an image as a document, we make it a witness in an important cause at the expense of artistic value. Popczyk writes that we demand too much; we want an image to be a piece of evidence, though it can never truly be one (Popczyk 2014, 63). Still, she notes that the opposite extreme incurs a risk too, as in treating an image solely as an illusion and turning it into an aesthetic artefact, where its role is belittled, pushed aside, or even rejected, and thus fails to be introduced into the circuit of history. Such an image is additionally burdened with suspicion of manipulation (Popczyk 2014, 63). Popczyk declared herself to be an adherent of an approach that recognizes the dual nature of photography, whose output needs to be conceived as a document and a work of art that possesses artistic value, as only such a perspective makes it possible to reveal its critical dimension.

In my deliberations, I would like to avoid the risks and interpretive dead ends that Popczyk warns against. I do not consider Wilczyk's photographs to be documents that deliver unequivocal truths about Upper Silesia or, conversely, that they distort the picture of the region or create its illusion by employing particular conventions, aesthetic codes, or other devices. I would rather be inclined to claim that photographs are something between an objective record or imprint of reality and

an artistic creation or subjective expression of a vision entertained by the subject who presses the shutter release. Alternatively, they are one and the other simultaneously, while attempts to analyze them in the categories of truth and falsity may yield much less compelling outcomes than answering how they exert their effect: how they construct the social or what their political consequences are. In my opinion, using elements of existing codes, Wilczyk casts and immobilizes suitably cropped fragments of the regional landscape in the role of objects of aesthetic contemplation. His artistic devices contribute to the consolidation of the image of Upper Silesia as a barren land whose heyday has long since passed; the landscape captured in the photographs, represented by views of post-industrial ruins, is not unlike a moonscape, a designation it may be deemed to deserve. In this respect, the photographs are in consonance with the sights reproduced in films: their details fit well into the depictions known from works by Rosa and others who continued in that particular stylistic vein. Together, they partake in the landscaping of Upper Silesia, a process which consists in exposing those areas that fail to meet the requirements of “purified space.” One could therefore say that they become instruments of epistemological conquest of sites that are different or peripheral with regard to the most privileged types of national landscape. The case of Upper Silesia seems to corroborate Mitchell’s diagnosis, namely that landscape today is an “‘exhausted’ medium, at least for the purposes of serious art or self-critical representation” (Mitchell 2002b, 5). Are there really no tools with which one could transcend the dominant mode of constructing and perceiving the views of Upper Silesia?

## 7.

Under the assumption that the above representations of Upper Silesian landscape are indeed iconic in nature, both in terms of semiotics, as they come into being through synecdoche and—perforce—have to resemble the referent, and in popular understanding, meaning that they are exceptionally recognizable; in this light, the culminating sequence in Rosa’s film with which this analysis began seems an act of iconoclasm. As already observed, the demolition of the ruins of a disused factory may be interpreted as a symbolic token of change in the lives of the protagonists of *Co słonko widziało*, but it may equally well be only a chimera of a fresh start: the chimney towering over the town is a legacy of the region’s past, but its destruction will have no retrograde effect on that past, which after all has shaped the circumstances in which Rosa’s characters live. Getting rid of an inconvenient image—a visible testimony to a particular method of arranging the visual field—does not abrogate the rules which govern the arrangement. Furthermore, one of the properties of iconoclastic gesture is that it tends to multiply the old



and create new images rather than dispose of any for good.<sup>4</sup> This is evidenced in the proliferation of representations which iterate the depiction of a degraded and backward Upper Silesia, and in the rise of shopping centers and glass-covered towers where mines had once been, where the new structures have identical equivalents throughout Poland. Shattering the icon is not a condition which, if met, will enable insights into the diversity of Upper Silesia, become a point of departure for a critical reflection on its place in the national imaginary, or create possibilities for articulating regional identity from a more agential position. I believe that the only means of neutralizing the incapacitating outcomes of Upper Silesian “landscaping” may be found in such uses of landscape forms which go against Mitchell’s assertion, which adopt a change of viewpoint, a realignment, an adjustment of distance as pre-requisites of apprehension, reflection, and action. In other words, they reformulate the rules governing the visual field from within the latter. Searching for and explaining the dynamics which drive such representations is a project worthy of undertaking by landscape and visual culture researchers.

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4 The efficacy of the iconoclastic gesture—among other things—was compellingly discussed by Zaremba (2014a).



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# New landscapes of the post-industrial city

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## Abstract:

This paper attempts to analyze modern urban space in the context of intercepting the effects of biopolitical production by means of a conceptual apparatus taken from urban landscape studies. Among the discussed sections of urban space, which illustrate the issue undertaken in this text, there are first and foremost places that focalize and intertwine practices of urban design, landscape architecture, design and media initiated by local governments, institutions, and private investors. All of these practices strive to create a new type of urban landscapes, characterized by their simultaneous functioning as sights and as "urban stages." Following from the above findings, this paper aims to describe the listed forms of land use in terms derived from cultural concepts of landscape, considering the latter to be a useful tool for explaining the relations between modern urban subjects and the environment they exist in.

## Key words:

landscape, post-industrial city, work, biopolitical production, fatigue

One of the researchers conducting a participant observation during the Auditorium Festival in Płock wrote the following in her field notebook: "On Saturday morning I heard a guy leaving the festival through the main square and saying to his friend, 'look, people are going to work and I feel as if I were coming back from work'" (Szlendak and Olechnicki 2017, 159). This comment is a crystallization of the phenomenon of fading borders between work and pastimes, which is characteristic for post-Fordism. What is more, the information provided by the researcher allows us to note that we are dealing with a spatial phenomenon—namely, one that can be located by asking for links connecting it to the materiality of the context.

In accordance with autonomists' conceptions, among others, we can assign not only individual but also cultural character to the discursively conveyed experience of that man. Researchers related to this current of Marxism connect the phenomenon of proliferation of work spacetime with the real subsumption of labor under capital, carried out in the post-Fordist era, which designates the situation where

the power of capital stretches over the whole of the subject's life (Bednarek 2012, 238). In effect, according to Joanna Bednarek, "each activity becomes directly productive, the divisions into work and leisure, production and consumption, production and reproduction of the work force, productive and unproductive labor disappear" (Bednarek 2012, 238). Thus, we can say that in the era of *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) all practices engaging the subject are in fact work. That means that their effects, regardless of the form they adopt, can be seen as a source of values, which makes them prone to interception.

One of the areas where the phenomenon of intercepting the effects of biopolitical production can be located and analyzed is modern urban space. It is within the administrative limits of the city that we currently find "devices" powered by "that which is alive" (Juskowiak 2015, 106). What I mean by that are those sections of urban space that focalize and intertwine practices of urban design, landscape architecture, design and media initiated by local governments, institutions, and private investors. All these practices strive to create a new type of urban landscape, characterized by their simultaneous functioning as sights and as "urban stages" (Rewers 2015, 53-56). Following from the above findings, this paper aims to describe the listed forms of land use in terms derived from cultural concepts of landscape, considering the latter to be a useful tool for explaining the relations between modern urban subjects and the environment they exist in.

## Productive paradox

Landscape has come to be understood as an equivocal term, the use of which does not determine the subject of analysis. Referring back to Beata Frydryczak's findings, we can note that if the perspective adopted by a scholar coincides with the point of view of aesthetics, then when talking about the landscape we analyze "the view," discerning in the object of inquiry, first of all "the space of perception and visual experience" or "a topographic space mediated by images" (Frydryczak 2013, 43). Whereas, if we base the analysis upon geography, "the area" and issues related to "the terrain and the living environment" become the subject of reflection (Frydryczak 2013, 43). Frydryczak stresses that the differentiation between the two meanings of landscape has, most of all, an ordering character; aesthetics completes its understanding of landscape with geographers' proposals, including in its framework intuitions arising from thinking about landscape in terms of "environment," "place," or "territory," just as geography broadens its conception of landscape, devoting more attention to issues of symbolization and depiction (Frydryczak 2013, 42-43). This sense of broadening geographic takes on landscape can be observed, among others, in papers devoted to this issue by Sharon Zukin (1991) and Don Mitchell (2000), from whom I have adopted the belief that the spaces under discussion in the present paper can be considered landscapes.

According to Frydryczak, what speaks to the development of the connections between these two approaches to landscape are, first of all, those concepts that discern, in both its aesthetic and geographic perspectives, a *sui generis* cultural phenomenon. It is precisely on the basis of cultural conceptions of landscape that reflection on the paradox of the term landscape can evolve. Thus, we can note that this paradox is more than the effect of a diversity of perspectives among academic disciplines; it is also a lineament inherent to the experience of the subject situated in the world, who perceives the latter once as an image and once again as an absorbing process.

The connection of the two meanings of landscape proposed by Frydryczak—the aesthetic and the geographic—becomes especially necessary when testing its productivity in the analysis of particular spatial environments, just like the new post-industrial landscapes of the city that are of interest here. As I noted before, they constitute phenomena characterized by simultaneously functioning in the role of views and urban stages, where the performance of biopolitical production takes place. The material base or canvas of the view is urban land under development and the Internet, where we find photographic and cinematic representations of new landscapes, which create a second-degree view of sorts. A critically oriented analysis of the new landscapes of the post-industrial city that I am proposing here cannot ignore the fact that these are spaces which we can enter and in which we can immerse ourselves; hence, they constitute a context for sensory experience. So, if they create images expressed in the medium of the earth, then these are very special images, which can be entered—to use the language of experience. Only noticing the dual nature of these new landscapes of the post-industrial city allows one to capture the specificity of their intermedia influence on the subject and to note, in this influence, the procedures of authority intercepting the effects of the work that is being done therein.

## Four Cases

The list of places that present an example of the forms of land use that interest me here is very long, but the aim is not to fully reconstruct it, although it might be worth doing so elsewhere. Hence, I will concentrate on several chosen examples, which I am not treating as synecdoche for the analyzed phenomenon but rather as elements of the series created by it. These numerous spaces constitute an indication of a more general trend in land-use policies, which makes their particular realizations relatively similar to each other. What is important is that this similarity does not result from some uniformity in applied design principles, although here too conformities can be found, for instance in terms of the construction and finishing materials or the type of planting. It rather follows from the similarity of their functional programs, or more precisely, the manner in which these programs are

being used in producing a view. At the source of this similarity lies, presumably, a sort of linkage, which is currently being implemented on a global scale, between urban land-use policies and the aesthetics of capitalism. Within their scope, there are views being constructed, and humans in motion constitute an important component, transforming that which is alive into an image. The relation of equivalence that we observe by taking under consideration the functional dimension of these landscapes allows one to see them as global creations, even though we find them when walking the streets of particular cities or browsing the Internet for information.

If, among the already existing representations of urbanity, we were to search for an analogue of our spaces of interest or the climate created by them, we might notice a certain problematic overlap with the vision presented in a poster made by Ecologistes, a neighborhood movement, a nostalgic description of which opens the book *Rebel Cities* by David Harvey: "I came across a poster put out by the Ecologistes, a radical neighborhood action movement dedicated to creating a more ecologically sensitive mode of city living, depicting an alternative vision for the city. It was a wonderful ludic portrait of old Paris reanimated by a neighborhood life, with flowers on balconies, squares full of people and children, small stores and workshops open to the world, cafes galore, fountains flowing, people relishing the river bank, community gardens here and there" (2012, IX). What allows us to associate this poster scene with the new landscapes of the post-industrial city is its dynamism, coming from the fact that it is full of various activities, people, and the movement of nature. As I intend to prove, this connotation is only partially accurate. For the vision of the city in the Ecologistes poster is characterized most of all, as Harvey stresses himself, by its "alternativeness." Hence, the dynamism penetrating the vision is of a special character. It is an aesthetic effect of a bottom-up manner of governing over urban space; therefore, standing behind it, there is an ethical component different from the one on which designs of new landscapes are founded. For dynamism, characteristic for the latter, is an effect of participants' mobilization occurring in a gesture accomplished through aesthetic measures that resembles Althusserian "interpellation" (Althusser 1971). Hence, although the designs of these new public spaces often times make use of aesthetics characteristic for urban movements, they are not spaces of actual autonomy. Because of that, we can say that they are defined by some type of semantic ambivalence, consisting of apparent similarity to the bottom-up enclaves.

Probably the most famous, emblematic example of these landscapes is New York's High Line park located on a closed railway line that crosses Manhattan over 23 street. What makes this area stand out is not only competently composed greenery and street furniture, but most of all the fact that it is elevated above street level and that its linear structure invites one to rest on the wooden seats by the path or to walk along it. The spectacular nature of High Line follows mainly from local conditionings of

spatial context, which in fact strengthen the aesthetic impact of this place and amplify its special quality, that is, the picturesqueness that transforms the landscape into an object of interest for photography (Frydryczak 2013, 10-11). Taking into account the high tourist flows generated by High Line, we may note that this space confirms the thesis formulated by Zukin in the 1990s—namely, that the materiality of the city, which creates a type of an intermedia canvas, nowadays constitutes the basic medium of its promotion (Zukin 1995, 16). Among realizations inspired by High Line, there are parks like Lines of Life in Singapore, the Promenade of Curiosities in London, and Skygarden in Seoul. In New York there are plans to create a reverse High Line, dubbed Low Line, which is to be constructed in the underground trolleybus station by the Williamsburg Bridge in 2021<sup>1</sup>.

The presence of water is something that, next to abandoned transport infrastructure, draws the attention of creators of new urban spaces, which can be confirmed by the number of *waterfronts* that have been completed. Among them we can point out the design of Vistula boulevards, especially the part lying beside the Copernicus Science Centre and the temporary premises of the Museum of Modern Art, in the background of which we can see the frontage of Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie along with the postmodern façade of the Warsaw University Library. Both the boulevard area and the practices related to the cultural consumption it promotes are interesting, where the area itself concentrates various forms of leisure activities and sets the stage for practices like antique book fairs. The architectural design of the boulevards, which are paved with light granite, does not leave much space for greenery. However, it does constitute an important compositional element of two of its green areas, located by the two museum buildings—the Discovery Park by the Copernicus Science Centre and the Skwer Kapitana Stanisława Skibniewskiego “Cubryny” by the Museum of Modern Art. The structure of the Vistula boulevards is not as compact as it is in the case of High Line, not only because of the differences in their planting, but primarily because of the fact that the boulevards are not unified by a media-communicated vision. They do not have a website, and their landscape is divided into many smaller spaces, characterized by the institutions located at their center. That is why the boulevards’ audience is rather diverse, and it is harder to navigate its movements.

The river bank, as an organizing structure of the designed landscape, is also a component of the Chicago Riverwalk. The boulevard stretching along the southern bank of the Chicago River is located between State and LaSalle street. Ross Barney, from Jacobs/Ryan Associates, is the creator of the waterfront design.<sup>2</sup> Apart from a walking path, there are various micro-recreational-areas, which are a convenient spot from which to observe boulevard life. Especially distinctive elements of this space are the amphitheatrical River Theater and a cascading embankment split by

1 <https://theweekendguide.com/urban-projects-inspired-by-nyc-high-line/>

2 For more information, see JRA Jacobs/Ryan Associates Landscape Architects’ website: <http://www.jacobsryan.com>.

an illuminated crevice, both located on the block between Clark and LaSalle street. Both structures serve as sitting areas, which, along with an additional diagonal traffic corridor, creates an impression of energy and dynamism. This feature manifests itself in particular when looking at the Riverwalk from a distance, for instance from one of the bridges. This way of looking at the waterfront is suggested by its administrators in the visual material available on the website of the project.<sup>3</sup>

A slightly different strategy for depicting a newly created public space is proposed by the administrators of New York's Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park, which serves as a park space and as a memorial dedicated to Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>4</sup> The first impression of the park's website convinces the observer that they are part of the story told by the park landscape. The website opens with a panoramic picture of Manhattan being photographed by a tourist standing in the center of the frame. The silhouette of the city is, therefore, presented as a sprawling view, seen from a particular point of the park's landscape. The impression of being within the landscape is additionally stressed by the Chinese box structure of the presented scene. The observer looks at Manhattan through the lens of the person that took the photo posted on the website, as well as through the camera display of the photographed tourist. The technical specifications of the two pictures, their high contrast and resolution, in conjunction with the way they present architectural detail—always in a close, tactile relation with users—build the particular atmosphere of this landscape already at a visual level. It is defined most of all by the experience of immersion. What is more, the close-ups of the tourists, mostly presented in the foreground of the photograph, not only complement the landscape but are its inalienable elements.

## Activation of “passive negatives”

New landscapes of post-industrial cities are created as an effect of urban revitalization or subsidized infrastructural projects, as well as projects based on public-private partnerships. They are supposed to function as recreational spaces that accommodate meetings and exchanges, while forming a picturesque *mise-en-scène*. In terms of typology, their locations are rather diverse. They often include areas around the premises of cultural institutions such as museums, cultural centers, libraries, the surroundings of universities, business centers or shopping malls, the neighborhoods of disused workplaces, factories or mines, or—as the examples cited before show—areas of railway wastelands in city centers, and ever more often waterfronts.

The popularity of urban revitalization programs results from local governments being aware of the potential returns on investments in the urban fabric—its modifications, aestheticizing adaptations, and modernization of the infrastructure.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.chicagoriverwalk.us/>.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.fdrfourfreedomspark.org>.



What is interesting is that nowadays these programs span over urban spaces long escaping the attention of government officials and investors. Namely, spaces that, according to the terminology proposed by Oskar Hansen formulated in order to define a symbolically undeveloped residential interior, could be called “passive negative,” while taking under consideration the complexity of the implications that this term entails. Hansen wrote that “if ... we were to open the ceiling and pour plaster in, we would get a mechanical, passive cast of the room. The *active negative* is a conversion of the passive negative with the use of our visual needs and our impressions into a humanistic tool for visual impact” (Quoted in Wasieczko 2013). Of course, it should be stressed that Hansen’s research concerned, most of all, culturally activating the users of the architectural space of real socialism and was related to giving them more power over the forms of their everyday lives. However, I think that, with an appropriate accentuation of perspectives, the term proposed by Hansen could also be applied to urban interiors. In the times of symbolic economy, the latter have become the subject of an increased effort aimed at creating meaning, undertaken by the administrators of spaces and the creators of urban policy in cooperation with city users. Investing in public spaces of the city could therefore be considered a sign of urban policy makers noticing the potential of what Jan Gehl, in a slightly different context, called “life between buildings” (Gehl 2011). One should note that the development of this awareness among city officials is beneficial in equal measure as it is controversial for the residents. It is consistent with the logic of a neoliberal city—a logic based on intercepting the effects of biopolitical production, which is carried out in the processes of “the urbanization of capital” identified by Harvey (2012, 66). This process generally involves a tight coupling of the domain of urban projects with initiatives aiming at the extraction of rent. Importantly, that which is to potentially generate value is not only the urban land for investment, but also its future uses, the nature of which is determined by the functional programs provided for these spaces. Hence, the urbanization of capital is based not only on the transformations of the built environment, but also on modeling socio-cultural attitudes so as to guarantee their compliance with the dominant idea for a city at a given time. Harvey writes that “the reproduction of capital passes through processes of urbanization in myriad ways. But the urbanization of capital presupposes the capacity of capitalist class powers to dominate the urban process. This implies capitalist class domination not only over state apparatuses (in particular those aspects of state power that administer and govern the social and infrastructural conditions within territorial structures), but also over whole populations—their lifestyles as well as their labor power, their cultural and political values as well as their mental conceptions of the world” (2012, 66). As I intend to demonstrate, the landscape, and the fact that it can be used to model experience, is one of the more effective techniques for achieving the hegemony mentioned by Harvey.

## Social production of a view

New landscapes are locations where the socio-cultural dimension of the urbanization of capital, recognized by Harvey, manifests itself particularly clearly. The life of these places, both in the case of privatized spaces<sup>5</sup> and those remaining in the public domain, is not only the result of the efforts of landscape architects, design specialists, and greenery designers; its rendering is possible mainly due to the activity of the users, giving, more or less consciously, their consent to co-create a capitalist performance by lending their time and consuming the energy of their bodies within the boundaries of the location. Because of the close dependence of new landscapes on the labor of their users, in some respects they are for post-industrial cities what factories were for industrial metropolises. This analogy is based on the observation that in both cases we are dealing with figures representing the use of the medium of space in the organization of production practices. Because the interactive and multisensory scenography of the new landscapes would suggest that we are dealing with recreational spaces, their functioning as a space of work is not visible at first glance. However, that changes if we treat the activities indicated here as production practices, associating them with the notion of “immaterial labour” proposed by autonomists (Hardt and Negri 2000, 29).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri distinguish three main “aspects of immaterial labour.” They include “the communicative labor of industrial production that has newly become linked in informational networks, the interactive labor of symbolic analysis and problem solving, and the labor of the production and manipulation of affects. This third aspect, with its focus on the productivity of the corporeal, the somatic, is an extremely important element in the contemporary networks of biopolitical production” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 30). Although the authors of *Empire* do not give any examples of specific practices that could fall within the model they propose, I think that it is possible to link the activities of the users of new landscapes with the third aspect of immaterial labor. This interpretation is supported by the fact that these activities are defined by the “productivity of bodies and the value of affect” which according to the authors should be included in analyses of immaterial work: “One of the most serious shortcomings has thus been the tendency (...) to treat the new laboring practices in biopolitical society only in their intellectual and incorporeal aspects. The productivity of bodies and the value of affect however, are absolutely central in this context”. (Hardt, Negri 2000, 29-30)

Seemingly trivial practices, which we will call “everyday urbanism” (Chase, Crawford, and Kaliski 2008), a term proposed by the Californian architect Margaret Crawford, are a specific form of work that sustains the existence of the landscape. These practices

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<sup>5</sup> What I mean here are forms of land use, popular in the US and in Western European countries, consisting in putting private spaces into public use, called POPOS—Privately Owned Public Open Spaces.

include just being within the landscape, which consists of simply having picnics or sitting on a bench, as well as the whole spectrum of practices related to fitness, such as the rather urban phenomenon of jogging and also various media practices: listening to music, taking pictures, video recording, and field recording. Anthony Flint notes the key role of the physical co-presence of users in constructing the brand of a given landscape. When analyzing the space of High Line, he notes that the presence of people, the fact that they spend their time there, wandering around or resting, has become a recognizable sign of that place—its “signature” (Flint 2014). Therefore, if, in accordance with the intentions of administrators of urban space, new landscapes are becoming recognizable icons of the city, it is also happening due to the users carrying out the work of direct landscape production through the practices of everyday urbanism. The presence of people, which is part of the designed view, makes these spaces attractive for other visitors, and the popularity of a given landscape is also its advertisement. The material dimension of landscape production is also accompanied by the communicative dimension. New landscapes exist in the minds of residents and tourists as noteworthy places because of the exposure they get through social media practices that coalesce around them: pictures, sound recordings, video, or recorded running routes.

The thesis on the social production of landscape view proposed here calls for asking questions about its collective subject. Bednarek notes that “the hegemonic form taken by labor in the post-Fordist economy creates conditions for the establishment of a new universal political subject, an equivalent of the proletariat of the industrial phase of capitalism” (Bednarek 2012, 243). This observation is the basis for a reexamination of Zukin’s thesis, formulated in *Landscapes of Power*, that “these days, workers are important because they consume, not because they produce anything that culture values” (Zukin 1991, 4). Granted, Zukin formulated this thesis in regards to the transformations undergone by cities as a result of the crisis of Fordism while bearing in mind the fate of former industrial workers. However, this thesis cannot be maintained if one takes into account the productivity constitutive of new landscapes, the productivity of that which is bodily. A subject caught in an environmental relationship, who is proposed specific action scripts within the landscape, not only consumes the place he finds himself in but also actively creates it. On this approach, the figure of the worker loses its connection to the class structure model that was in force in the times of Fordism, because anyone who uses these areas becomes a laborer producing landscape through everyday practices.

If new landscapes and the figure of the factory are linked by some additional qualities, then it is primarily due to the fact that these are spatialities of alienated labor. It should be noted that the exchange between the materiality of new landscapes and their users does not have the trappings of a creative experiment because it is subject to the control exercised by the tactical and strategic tangle characteristic of biopower. Hence, these are spaces that aspire to function beyond time, protecting themselves from changes that could be brought about by the transforming

activity of users. Thus, the view that is being constructed here is to communicate the idea of immutability. This significantly limits the scope of critical practices possible here, which at the same time makes new landscapes of the post-industrial city spaces of invisible cultural oppression, emblematic environments of “the society of control.” According to Hardt and Negri: “The society of control might thus be characterized by an intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinarity that internally animate our common and daily practices, but in contrast to discipline, this control extends well outside the structured sites of social institutions through flexible and fluctuating networks” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 23). Franco “Bifo” Berardi in *The Uprising* presents an analysis of the problematic situation of the subject trying to resist neoliberal networking—the materialization of which we are also dealing with, in my opinion, in the case of new landscapes. Berardi believes that in the times of “hypercomplexity” and “overcrowded infosphere” (Berardi 2012, 10) the logic of social behavior becomes the logic of “swarm”: “you can express your refusal, your rebellion and your nonalignment, but this is not going to change the direction of the swarm, nor is it going to affect the way in which the swarm’s brain is elaborating information” (Berardi 2012, 16).

## Instead of conclusions: The critical potential of fatigue

The manner in which new urban landscapes function partially confirms the negative diagnosis put forward by Berardi. Their being open to the practices of everyday life, which become a component of the view, does not mean consent to all their forms, including, among others, those that could disrupt the coherence of the landscape projection, achieved by recreating the impression of its ahistoricity and natural-ity. Among the practices that are particularly dangerous for the coherence of the view, one can single out, above all, those that are manifestations of fatigue. This is evidenced by, among others, the strategies of supervision and control exercised by administrators and users over the continuity of the spectacle taking place on urban stages. Let us note that striving to eliminate all signs of fatigue is another element, besides productivity and alienation, linking the new landscapes of the post-industrial city with the modern factory.

Anson Rabinbach in *Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue and the Origins of Modernity* shows that the modern factory dealt with fatigue with the use of findings of researchers co-creating the so-called “European science of work” (Rabinbach 1992, 182-88). It was grounded in the conviction, characteristic for modern productivism, that fatigue is the last obstacle on the path to progress, which will be achieved when the energy expended by muscles in the course of labor reaches a consistency resembling the work of a machine (Rabinbach 1992, 2). Thus, fatigue, as a state that prevents work, stood in obvious contradiction with the idea of the continuity of the production process, which made it the subject of practices aimed at its elimination.

In the case of the new landscapes of the post-industrial city, progress, as the goal of fatigue reducing practices, is replaced by the idea of an uninterrupted circulation of bodies and information, which is to take place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to use the Jonathan Crary's (2013) phrasing. Fatigue threatens this constant movement because of its ambivalent relationship with time. The analysis of this ambivalence embedded in fatigue can be found in a short book by Emanuel Levinas *Existence and Existents* (1978). According to the philosopher, we can think of fatigue as a state in which the subject realizes their spatiotemporal condition: "Fatigue—even, and above all, the fatigue that is unthinkingly termed physical—presents itself first as stiffening, a numbness a way of curling up into oneself. Conceived as muscular exhaustion or toxicity by psychologists and physiologists, it comes to the attention of philosopher in an entirely different way. A philosopher has to put himself in the instant of fatigue and discover the way it comes about. Not its significance with respect to some system of references, but the hidden event of which an instant is the effectuation and not only the outcome" (Levinas 1978, 30). The discussed phenomenon is in this sense the experience of a desynchronization of sorts, consisting in a lag that occurs between being and itself (Levinas 1978, 30)—it is the experience of mortality, end, debility, fragility of the body, implicating the necessity of rest, withdrawal, and cessation of work: "We shall show later that this lag that occurs between a being and itself, which we have brought out as the principal characteristic of fatigue, constitutes the advent of consciousness, that is, a power to 'suspend' being by sleep and unconsciousness" (Levinas 1978, 30). We can therefore note that fatigue, as an experience of existential character, becomes dangerous because it destabilizes and desynchronizes the "automation" that govern the system (Berardi 2012, 17). Thus, it is not surprising that the aim of discourses focused on maintaining the stability and continuance of these hegemonic views is the elimination of fatigue, which in the case of the new landscapes of the post-industrial city consists in producing attractive and multi-sensory spatial environments that encourage deferring fatigue and devoting oneself to the view producing circulation. We can also perceive fatigue as a type of temporary deficiency, a phenomenon creating a situation that Berardi calls "insolvency" (Berardi 2012, 16)—according to whom, it is: "not only a refusal to pay the costs of the economic crisis provoked by the financial class, but it is also a reject of the symbolic debt embodied in the cultural and psychic normalisation of daily life" (Berardi 2012, 16). Fatigue, not fitting in with the visual order of designed views, acquires the status of a phenomenon of critical potential. It calls for the subject to resign from participating in the cultural production of emotions and affections, whereas to participate is precisely what he is being encouraged to do by the new landscapes of the post-industrial city.

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# Contemporary sites of contemplation: contemplative nature of the aesthetic experience of natural and transformed landscape in *Roden Crater* by James Turrell and *Lucid Stead* by Philip K. Smith

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## Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to offer an interpretation of two contemporary art works: James Turrell's *Roden Crater* and Philip K. Smith's *Lucid Stead*. They are seen as projects that may be qualified as examples of art based on the artists' playing with light. The claim being that one of the factors that engenders a contemplative attitude on behalf of the beholder is the presence of light in relation to the artwork's structure.

## Key words:

contemporary art, land art, James Turrell, Philip K. Smith

The following analysis of *Roden Crater* by James Turrell and *Lucid Stead* by Philip K. Smith will first and foremost make an attempt at defining the notion of "contemplation" with respect to what may be designated as contemporary sites of landscape contemplation, where both natural and transformed landscapes are involved. Here, the sites in question are selected works created by the aforementioned artists (i.e., *Roden Crater* and *Lucid Stead*), which in view of their target locations, visual qualities, spatial symbolism, and mystical-symbolic content may be approached and examined in that very context. I will also be interested in the viewer's direct visual



and aesthetic experience of the landscape and the works, as this is expected to prove helpful in the attempt to formulate a definition of contemplation.

Contemplation may be described as a kind of extraordinary consciousness, gratitude for the gift of life, apprehension of our place in the universe, but also solitude which leads to enlightenment, to a communion with substance which eludes human experience. “For in contemplation we know by ‘unknowing.’ Or, better, we know beyond all knowing or ‘unknowing’” (Merton 1972, 1-2). It is indefinable— aspiring for an experience of transcendence or mysticism. “Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being” (Merton 1972, 1). Contemplation is perceived as a higher form of spirituality and, going further, may constitute a domain of prophets or messiahs. Lonely wandering results in Abraham’s revelation. Jesus spends 44 days alone in the desert. Mohammed stays in the Cave of Hira near Mecca, devoted to contemplation. That is also where one night he experiences his first revelation that marks the beginning of his prophetic mission (Chojnacki 2008). It may be stressed at this point that contemplation means an individual experience one goes through in solitude, which considerably hampers the classification or naming of the emotions and feelings that accompany it, thus precluding an examination of contemplation as a collective or communal experience. Can works such as *Roden Crater* by James Turrell and *Lucid Stead* by Philip K. Smith be therefore called contemporary sites of contemplation? Does the fact that they are to be found in locations with particular visual features bring us closer to an aesthetic, perhaps even spiritual experience of landscape, or is the opposite the case, that is, do we become more remote and the experience more distant? Finally, can the experience of landscape be a contemplative one?

James Turrell is an American artist born in 1943 for whom space and light have been the chief area of artistic exploration. *Roden Crater* is one of the best-known works of the artist, in whose own opinion it is his life’s foremost achievement. Since 1978 until the present day, the artist has been working on a kind of observatory built in the Arizona desert, where each viewer can use specially designed apertures in the roof and walls to observe the sky, natural weather phenomena, and the cyclicity of nature. Spectators are also able to see the changes of Earth’s position with regard to the Sun, and thus “contemplate” the variation of the times of the day and the seasons (Sokolewski 2011, 173). To Turrell, space, light, and color temperatures of the latter are vehicles of mystical content and as such constitute an integral component of his works. The artist is also deeply respectful of the natural landscape of the Arizona desert. In my opinion, he manages to extract the essence and character from that space without destroying it, whilst underscoring its qualities, symbolism, and rhythm by creating a cultural landscape within the natural one. The symbols in *Roden Crater* derive not only from the iconography of Christian



mysticism but draw also on other religions and mythologies. After all, the observatory stands in the desert, which epitomizes a boundless expanse, infinity, lonely human wandering in search of the Absolute. It is an allegorical place of purification and meditation encountered in most belief systems. In this context, the desert may be viewed as a geographical location as well as symbolic of a state of mind, as contemplation involves silence and observation (Chojnacki 2008). The sensation of immobility, quiet, and emptiness can be experienced in the desert as a geographical location, where distinctive natural features and the relationship between the human and the surrounding space facilitate and enable contemplation. In this context, the desert is an allegory for a void, boundlessness, of existence beyond time in unity with nature, whereby the notional desert becomes a symbol of transcendence. The visual aspect of the desert as a landscape also fosters such sensations. Its vastness, possible mirages, and alternations of temperature may be treated as metaphors for spiritual states. Both the symbol and the actual place have, in my opinion, positive connotations drawing on the experience of emptiness, which is synonymous with a higher level of spiritual development in Zen philosophy and art. Here, the experience of emptiness is a value, a synonym of purification and rebirth, something that does not necessarily have to be filled in order to feel happiness. This approach to emptiness owes to the ideological difference in Zen philosophy and art, which a person such as myself, brought up largely in the Roman Catholic tradition, might not fully comprehend. James Turrell, on the other hand, was raised in the Protestant tradition (his parents were Quakers). Certain values preached in the Quaker doctrine—which I will briefly discuss in the context of the work—may be considered indications that the choice of the desert as a location for the piece was thoroughly deliberate. This is because Quakers believed in the divine, supernatural inner light found in the heart of every human being. At the same time, light is Turrell's principal means of artistic expression and the main axis of his works. In *Roden Crater*, natural light penetrating into the observatory co-creates it and becomes an integral part of it; this may be interpreted as the artist's consent and surrender to the power of light that has its source in the Absolute, an expression of humility towards the Creator without whom the work would possess no *raison d'être* and never become a totality. In the experience of that light lies the essence of aesthetic values which in Turrell's oeuvre approach metaphysical experience. Paulina Tendra seems to point to a similar relationship in her commentary on the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas: "Apart from a cognitive dimension, supreme beauty harbours a mystical sense which transcends reason (expressed in the very notion of *claritas*). A person who experiences such beauty is a holy one. [...] In that experience, God is revealed to the human through mystical contemplation, filling the latter with knowledge. [...] It is not only an act of cognition, but an act of love as well" (Tendra 2013, 123).

It may be noted that in earlier works the artist employed artificial light (e.g., in the famed *Twilight Arch*). It is there in *Roden Crater* as well, yet it performs a more pragmatic, utilitarian function, and therefore I do not consider it a vehicle of mystical substance. Still, *Roden Crater* betrays a change in the artist's perception as he departs from the mimetic notions of art in favor of the mystical and contemplative aspect, where an artwork becomes a window to the world and an integral part of the world, something which is very remote from any institutional understanding of art. One thus perceives a work and simultaneously experiences the space in which the work has been situated. The contemplative nature of aesthetic experience becomes a concurrent experience of the work and the landscape, thanks to which the former becomes an integral component of the space. As Leszek Sosnowski states, "in Pythagoras and Pythagoreans, ... contemplation of art is linked to contemplation of nature and cosmos, while contemplation of the order in celestial phenomena edifies the individual" (Sosnowski 2003, 2).

As can be seen, the Pythagorean notion of contemplation of art sets out from the contemplation of landscape as a value. Thus, natural landscape represents a superior value and, in a sense, a prototype for the artist. Using the symbolism of the circle as the architectural basis for his structure, Turrell draws on the cosmological order and therefore on nature as the aforesaid prototype, because the circle is a perfect figure, a symbol of the divine sphere, the sky, a reflection of the ideal, eternal motion (Kopaliński 1990). The possibility of contemplating the sky that the viewers are offered is associated with the artist's quest for transcendence and his attempt to make the experience available to the audience. "The symbol of sky denotes inexhaustibility, boundlessness, a general order, which encompasses cosmic, ethical or political order as well" (Burszta 1998, 118).

The immediacy of contact with God in which Quakers believe means that there is no need to appoint any intermediaries (priests) in the community, or to erect buildings dedicated strictly to sacred purposes (churches). Raised in such a tradition, the artist makes *Roden Crater* a shared space for the adherents of any religion or worldview, a space whose nature fluctuates between the sacred and the profane. The dominant feature in that space are stairs, which manage to create an illusion of a "stairway to heaven" (as the viewer ascending them approaches the sky), a mystical "celestial gate." In the context of the entire work, the stairs are a metaphorical symbol of the human journey towards light, the Absolute, or the Platonian realm of ideas. The combination of light—as a universal symbol of divinity—and the structural characteristics of *Roden Crater*, which draw on sacred architecture of many religions and the spatial arrangement of places of prayer across the world, warrants calling Turrell's piece a contemporary site of contemplation. Additionally, the experience of the work in the context of the desert landscape is contemplative, as "contemplative art ... teaches one how to engage in a great, relevant, and pure experience" (Filipowska 1997, 151).

Philip K. Smith is an American artist of the younger generation, whose preferred idiom is “light art.”<sup>1</sup> Most of his works to date appear to make references to, and even draw direct visual inspiration from, the oeuvre of James Turrell and Dan Flavin. In Smith’s installations, as well as in the majority of the pieces created by the latter artists, artificial, dissipated light provides the principal building block.

Made in 2013, *Lucid Stead* is an altogether different piece, though one cannot help noting certain similarities with Turrell’s *Roden Crater*, as they share symbolic references of the location in which they are to be found—that is, in the allegory-laden surroundings of the desert. As for the work itself, *Lucid Stead* is an erstwhile, 70-year-old dwelling in Joshua Tree National Park, in the transition zone between the Mojave and Colorado Deserts in southern California, which Smith subjected to artistic transformation. The fundamentals and the proportions of the house were retained, but most of the walls were covered with mirrors which reflect the boundless landscape around. At night, the mirror panels in which the artist installed LED lights shine with a surreal, colorful artificial light (Smith 2017). The perception of the work will change depending on the time of day, and the piece responds to the phenomena and rhythms of nature, transporting the viewer into a sphere where time is differently construed. According to Gadamer, a work of art is similarly determined by its own temporal structure rather than by the quantifiable duration of its existence through time (Gadamer 1986). In this case, the time of the work becomes the time of the spectator, as it were. Meanwhile, the desert landscape imposes a non-linear time in which the work is to be seen and viewed. Much like Mircea Eliade, Gadamer discerns two types of temporal experience: pragmatic and festive. Pragmatic time is a linear one, associated with action, with the performance of specific activities. Thus understood, time is not experienced in its own right, but as something that has to be “spent.” In contrast, festive time is fulfilled and autonomous, as due to the nature of its solemn character, “it is arrested itself and encourages that temporal tarrying of the human” (Sosnowski 2003, 6). It may be noted that the nature of experience of festive time is in fact an experience of landscape. It is impossible to engage in the latter without halting in one’s tracks and thus without a metaphorical halting of linear time. Festive time, being identical with the time of exposure to and encounter with a work of art or landscape, is inherently contemplative, determining a contemplative sensation of landscape (a sense of transcendence), where one exists outside time and in unity with it in the course of the experience. Through contemplative artwork, the viewer may—for a brief time—experience unity with the universe, feel a part of a greater whole. The mirror-laid *Lucid Stead* promotes the experience, as the piece appears to blend tangibly into the surrounding space, thereby enhancing the sense of unity with the landscape. The mirror-induced abstraction enables us to see that which

<sup>1</sup> Here, light art is taken to mean the kind of artistic utterance where light is the main or the only medium of artistic expression.

goes beyond the world of material phenomena. Thanks to the mirrors, the house is transposed from the utilitarian sphere of the real into the symbolic realm, where the now metaphorical home becomes an integral part of the space, without disrupting the natural landscape. “Home ... is a symbol of order, harmonious cosmic alignment, the navel of the world, the Universe: the roof is the sky, the walls are the Earth, the windows are gods” (Kopaliński 1990, 206-209). Thus, the house of mirrors becomes a site of contemplation of nature and the space around it, with which it is in consonance. At night, the house changes into an artistic installation, the windows glow with alternating colors of the chromatic spectrum. Given that—as Kant (2017) claimed—nature is sublime wherever it conveys the idea of their infinity, I find the less-than-spectacular use of artificial light in *Lucid Stead* to be an element which represents a contradiction of sorts to the purity of composition, construction and concept of the work that is seen during the day. For this reason, the “diurnal” variant of *Lucid Stead* may be legitimately considered a contemporary site of contemplation, whereas the “nocturnal” version should be situated among Smith’s earlier works, which should not be classified as such. The artist himself corroborates the inference that we are dealing with a site of contemplation, stating that “*Lucid Stead* is about tapping into the desert, into the pace of change, and it’s about responding to the quiet of the place. Ultimately, in that quiet, the project begins to unfold. It’s really about four ideas: light and shadow, reflected light, projected light, and change” (Smith 2017). In this understanding, contemplation may become a cure to Blaise Pascal’s distraction, the perennial dissipation of attention and proclivity to forget about important things. This notion of contemplation is, I feel, most apt with respect to that work.

The monumental works of these artists help one feel the rhythm of changes in nature. The temporal structure of their work is determined by the time at which the landscape is perceived and contemplated. The experience of landscape can be contemplative in this case, “as one can speak of transition from being with respect to landscape to being in the landscape” (Frydryczak 2006, 116). The tremendous respect that the artists have for natural light and their efforts to accentuate its qualities make one aware of its symbolic significance in the world of nature and elevate it to the rank of a superior element in the contemplative experience of landscape. “The human still entertains a conviction forged over the course of centuries, namely that light is a sign of beauty, truth, oneness and perfection, a close, kindred element recognized as similar by the alike” (Tendera and Rubiś 2017, 48).

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# Nonequilibrium landscapes and nature conservation in the Białowieża Forest

Agata Kowalewska

## Abstract:

Traditional conceptualizations presume that landscape and nature in general are characterized by a striving for balance. In consequence, environmental protection chiefly consists in conservation of the existing state, without making allowances for the dynamic changes caused by vital processes taking place in those landscapes, human and non-human alike. The current dispute concerning the protection of the Białowieża Forest is nothing but an upshot of the differences between the involved with respect to what should be protected on top of how it should be done. This study outlines the problems deriving from conceptualizations of nature and landscape as static entities and comes forward with a proposal of conceiving landscape not as an "image of the land"<sup>1</sup> but a corporeal experience of being in a space, on which climate change, civilizational and social transformation, political decisions, and bark beetles all have their impact.

## Keywords:

nonequilibrium landscapes, nature conservation, nonhuman expertise, Białowieża Forest

## Introduction—Ips typographus

This study attempts to reflect on the category of landscape and outline the ramifications of its two distinct conceptualizations for strategies of nature conservation. In these considerations, the ongoing, intense conflict regarding the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest will be employed here as a frame of reference. In autumn 2015, a plan was developed to increase logging in the forest to counter a massive population build-up of the European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*), which infests spruces and contributes to tree death. The decisions of Lasy Państwowe (the General Directorate of State Forests), endorsed by the Ministry of Environment, were met

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<sup>1</sup> For Polish speakers this category makes additional sense, because in Polish *krajobraz* (landscape) comes from *kraj* (land, country) and *obraz* (image, picture).

with protests from numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations dedicated to nature conservation, representatives of academic circles, and the public. Opponents criticized the logging increase and removal of trees, arguing that the spread of the bark beetle is a natural process which occurs in the forest at regular intervals and plays an important role there (Sokołowski 2002; Gutowski 2002), whilst advocating passive conservation of its ecosystem. This mode of protection had been implemented in the Białowieża National Park, where by 2015 the outbreak of the bark beetle had already begun to subside. Criticism prompted by logging plans soon gained broader social support, manifesting through social media,<sup>2</sup> demonstrations, and marches,<sup>3</sup> while the then minister of environment, Jan Szyszko, faced particularly severe backlash. It soon became clear that the conflict went beyond the facts of biology, reaching into the domain of worldview (Szyszko 2017). Indeed, the situation is more lucid when approached not so much as a contrariety of diagnoses made by forest conservation experts, but as a fundamental, ontological discrepancy in how the sides of the conflict construe basic notions, such as nature or landscape. These discrepancies lead directly to divergent opinions on the present and envisaged future landscape of the Białowieża Forest, as well as the ways to protect it. Landscape is one of the key notions in the discourse of nature conservation, and the manner in which it is defined bears materially on specific solutions and legal regulations. The entire Polish part of the Białowieża Forest is classified as a protected landscape area, which additionally overlaps—entirely or in part—with other protection schemes, such as national parks, strict reserves, or Natura 2000 areas.

The classical approach to landscape, based on the fundamental dualism of culture and nature as well as an objective understanding of nature, still endures, both in broader discourse and in nature conservation, despite having been criticized already in the latter half of the 20th century; in recent years, the departure from that paradigm has been almost complete. Now, the predominant approaches fuse the material-natural dimension with the cultural one (Ingold 2000; Wylie 2007), enabling landscape to be conceived as a space of life, both human and non-human. The European Landscape Convention, ratified by Poland in 2004, defines landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (Dz. U. 2006, no. 14, item 98). This approach highlights the human perspective as indispensable for the notion of landscape; in other words, landscape is embedded as a category in the human experience of space. Thus, it is not only an “image of the land” that the human may look at, but also a corporeal experience of being in a historically established space.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Facebook pages such as *Wierzę w Białowieżę* (*I believe in Białowieża*), *Kocham Puszczy* (*I love the Forest*), and *Obóz dla Puszczy* (*The camp for the forest*) gathered thousands of followers.

<sup>3</sup> For example, *Marsz Entów* (*The March of the Ents*) in January 2016, *Warszawski Marsz dla Puszczy* (*Warsaw March for the Forest*), and *Łódzki Spacer w obronie Puszczy* (*Łódź Walk in the Defense the Forest*) in June 2017.



## The History of the Forest

The Białowieża Forest is Europe's last lowland forest where primeval traits are still observed: a remnant of the forests which had once covered the North European Plain and have over time yielded almost everywhere to human expansion (Maris 2008). Approximately 10,000 years ago, a predominantly coniferous forest grew where the Białowieża Forest stands now, with spruces, pines, firs, and larches. Gradually, beeches, alders, and rowans appeared, and after another several thousand years the species composition in the forest approached the one seen today. However, the forest continues to change and, with the warming of the climate, it has begun to lose the characteristics of a taiga-type woodland and has begun to shift toward a composition typical of Central European mixed forests. The distinctive features of the Białowieża Forest include a very high percentage of old tree stands and an exceptionally high diversity of species and habitats, many of which are not found anywhere else (PTTK, n.d.). These well-preserved primeval features in the Białowieża Forest are attributed to a combination of numerous factors, natural as well as historical. These areas have never been densely populated, while intensive resource management began relatively late. The considerable thickness in conjunction with extensive wetland made the forest hardly accessible, thus providing safe habitats for large animals, especially the European bison, whose populations had already been decimated elsewhere in Europe in the Middle Ages. Paradoxically, the first known ordinances aimed at protecting the forest landscape from logging, land cultivation, and hunting were introduced to create hunting grounds for kings and dukes (Pracownia, n.d.). Though limited, agricultural activity in the forest affected and transformed some of its parts, creating new habitats; these may have been atypical for the area, but their existence is believed to have been one of the factors which enabled the survival of the bison population by increasing the amount of available food (Białowieski Park Narodowy, n.d.).

The forest is a chronicle recording the story of this part of Europe, with interwoven geological factors, climate changes, historical and social circumstances, partitions, wars, and political transformations. It is important to point out that, as the current crisis demonstrates, the forest is a living ecosystem in a constant state of flux and together with it changes its landscape, which is heterogenous and dependent on natural and human factors alike. As stated in the introduction, this text attempts to approach the crisis surrounding the Białowieża Forest as a clash of two perspectives: the foresters and the Ministry of Environment see the forest as a resource in Poland's project of sustainable development (Szyszko 2017), which requires active care and continuous nurturing by humans, whereas to the opponents of logging it is a mature ecosystem which, over thousands of years, developed mechanisms enabling it to tackle climate changes on its own, and the activity of the bark beetle is one of those (Mikulski 2016).

## Beetles are uglier than butterflies

In the domain of nature conservation, the discourse can sometimes be dominated by the aesthetic aspect, particularly when the debate becomes a public one and the goal is to gain the public support. In such a case, species and landscapes are evaluated, following which the more beautiful or interesting are given preference over the less likeable. The phenomenon—called greenwashing—is discussed by Jamie Lorimer in *Wildlife in the Anthropocene* (2015, 167). Building a conservation strategy by directing public attention to aesthetic aspects and charismatic species—that is, those that elicit positive responses in people, such as tigers, lynxes, or bison—entails the risk that visually unappealing beetles or fungi, whose significance for the ecosystem is not infrequently absolutely vital, will be ignored in the public debate. As for the conflict around the Białowieża Forest, its sides propagate different landscapes of the forest; materials publicized by the adherents of active protection predominantly feature photographs of a green, orderly forest composed largely of young, healthy trees, which are contrasted with images of dead spruces.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, advocates of passive conservation promote pictures of the forest showing fallen trees, windthrow, and high understorey, adding slogans such as “let the forest overgrow” on their posters (Karpieszuk 2017). The aesthetic layer is another token of the discrepancy between visions of the forest and its landscape entertained by either side.

Interestingly enough, the notion that the Białowieża Forest should be “tidied up” is not a new one. Henryk Sienkiewicz described his 1882 visit there as follows:

The belief that for the sake of the forest it should be left untouched is an erroneous one. Above all, it should be kept tidy, and how does the forest fare in that respect? One sees piles of trees here, lying over tremendous expanses, almost everywhere in fact. These mounds, decayed and rotten, rise up to several feet high. Over those, there tower colossal windthrows like houses. An old tree tears up the entire volume of earth caught in its roots. The pit its fall created gathers rainwater. It is a curious and a frightening sight that such sites present: the soil is ruptured and full of pitfalls, the trunks, the blowdowns and the dry, desperately twisted branches covered by moss or hideous damp fill the entire space; among the woody bedlam a bog shows through—everything disarrayed, broken, shattered, savage, dead, and rotting—there is your picture in a nutshell. Even the air is heavy, suffused with the stench of decayed wood and rottenness. (Sienkiewicz 1882, 39)

In Sienkiewicz, there is a palpable affective charge associated with the forest. It is largely positive, but a number of paragraphs, including the above description, evince pessimism that spreads death and atavistic fears of chaos. The forest reminds everyone that humans are never quite at home there; the landscape ceases to be friendly. The radical otherness of the deep forest often elicits rapture and respect, but it also

<sup>4</sup> Such imagery was used, for example, during the conference “Puszcza Białowieska — mity, fakty i przyszłość” (“Białowieża Forest—Myths, Facts, and the Future”), held on March 12, 2016 at the Senate of the Republic of Poland.

engenders uncertainty, fear, and repulsion in those who visit it. Fear of the uncontrollable otherness of the chaotic (from the human standpoint) landscape in the forest and the desire to bridle and subordinate it to a comprehensible order—conveyed by Sienkiewicz—seem to be one of the obstacles to reconciling the positions adopted by the opposing factions in the present-day conflict.

## The nature-culture dichotomy

The differences in how landscape is construed are founded on the ontology of nature and its relationship with the human. That foundation determines the specific object of protection when new regulations are drafted (e.g., whether it is a particular species or the ecosystemic process) and drives the preference for active or passive modes of conservation. The stance of the adherents of active protection relies on the categorial dissimilarity between humans and nature, and they argue that natural environment is a resource that should be managed; here, the subject and the object are clearly distinguished. In the normative layer, the human is valued higher than the non-human, as explicitly stated in minister Szyszko's public speeches (Szyszko 2017). The nature-culture dichotomy has long been the binding paradigm in the studies of both culture and nature (Descola 1996; Ingold 2000); it was only the latter half of the 20th century that saw the gradual spread of such conceptualizations of nature, environment, landscape, and their relation to humans where the radical division between nature and culture was challenged and attention was drawn to their interpenetrations and interdependencies (Haraway 2003). In recent years, a perspective presuming that nature (and, in consequence, landscape) is not an essentially static but a dynamic entity (Lorimer 2012; Zimmerer 2000) has been gaining ever greater popularity in disciplines that embark on conceptualizations of nature and conservation. The ramifications of that change are indeed numerous. As Karl Zimmerer observes in his paper on nonequilibrium landscapes, the balance of nature—previously a fundamental paradigm—is now questioned, even rejected, in some circles, having been replaced with dynamic processes, transformations, and trajectories (Zimmerer 2000, 356). The shift of the paradigm dictating our understanding of nature bears on our understanding of landscape, which thus becomes inherently mutable, volatile, and hybrid. This hybrid, dynamic ontology allows the proponents of passive protection to recognize non-human expertise in ecosystemic processes, and see the value as inherent in this old forest *as a system*, with its internal workings, from which we can learn.

## Practical implications

Given advancing climate change, the classical approach to nature conservation has begun to fail and, despite intense human efforts, landscapes change. Meanwhile,

the notions of nature and landscape as dynamic entities slowly gain firmer footing. Protection of nature, understood as preservation or conservation of the existing state, proves ineffectual in many places because internal processes and external factors do bring about changes in ecosystems. Actions aimed at preserving a landscape as it is are doomed to miscarry, or even lead to the disruption of spontaneous ecosystemic processes and, as a result, to a reduction of biodiversity.

Much seems to indicate that this is the case in the Białowieża Forest (Sokołowski 2002). Areas under forest management and active protection differ from those in the Białowieża National Park, where the spruce population, for instance, has systematically diminished since the establishment of the park a century ago. As Bogdan Jaroszewicz from the University of Warsaw's Białowieża Geobotanical Station suggests (Jaroszewicz 2016; Nauka w Polsce 2017), this is due to the climate warming and the decline of groundwater levels. These are adverse conditions for spruces, and they promote bark beetle infestations. If a high population of spruces were to be sustained in the Białowieża Forest, widespread sanitary logging would have to be carried out and at least 80% of the dead trees would have to be removed.<sup>5</sup> According to Jaroszewicz, such actions would nonetheless prove ineffective in the long term, while the forest would lose its unique characteristics with each sanitary logging. Having adopted the viewpoint that nature is dynamic, conservation focuses on the continuity of ecosystemic processes and on sustaining biodiversity rather than on species or habitats, thanks to which ecosystems can be conceptualized as both changeable and resilient (Wesołowski et al. 2016). As climate, hydrological, and civilizational changes continue, the transformation of the forest landscape seems inevitable, but that does not spell the end of the Białowieża Forest. Ensuring the continuity of ecosystemic processes and preservation of the unique characteristics of the forest requires passive protection that, to a significant extent, consists in having confidence in non-human expertise and the spontaneous, self-regulating mechanisms of its ecosystem. This, in turn, requires curiosity about the subsequent stage of transformation, about how the forest will tackle the bark beetles and climate change, how it will look in ten, twenty, and a hundred years (Lorimer 2014).

## Conclusions

Considering the difficulties resulting from static conceptualizations of landscape, the perspective suggested here adopts a notion of an inconstant and dynamic landscape which spans all the lives taking place therein, both human and non-human. In consequence, the category of landscape can embrace its other meaning—that is,

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<sup>5</sup> There is an interesting study which recapitulates the position of adherents of passive protection; its relevance is supported by the scientific authority of the authors, though it occasionally employs sharp rhetoric—see Wesołowski et al. (2016).

the experience of being in a particular space. Landscape construed as an experience of communing with space enables development of a nature conservation strategy that eschews the picturesque or beauty, but still follows affective logic, which I understand after Lorimer as a mode of understanding, of feeling, and of engaging in relations directed towards nature, all of which derive from and remain inseparably linked to the corporeal experience of non-human charisma (Lorimer 2015, 35). Humans can therefore learn to build affective relationships. This perspective—evinced in the European Landscape Convention—if propagated, would create the scope for introducing a range of novel solutions based on the coexistence of the human and the non-human, as well as introducing and recognizing non-human expertise and agency. In order for that to be feasible, one should necessarily *learn* sensibility to nature in its many forms and dimensions, including the sublime and beautiful actors, such as wolves and centuries-old oaks, along with the inconspicuous ones, such as *Ips typographus*, whose role is anything but unimportant.

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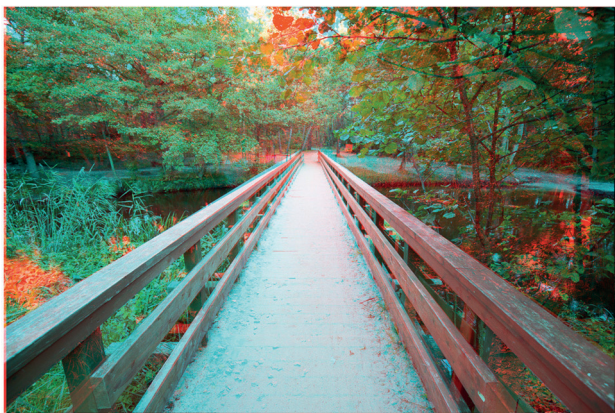
ISSN 2657-327X

DOI 10.14746/pls. 2019.4.5.11

# Granica. Rekonesans wizualny (The Frontier. A Visual Reconnaissance). 2018

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KULTUROWE  
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ISSN 2657-327X

DOI 10.14746/pls.2019.4.5.12

# Lappland. 2017

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KULTUROWE  
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ISSN 2657-327X

DOI 10.14746/pls. 2019.4.5.13

# **Dopóki. Wisła (Until. Vistula). 2013—2014**

**Wojciech Sternak**

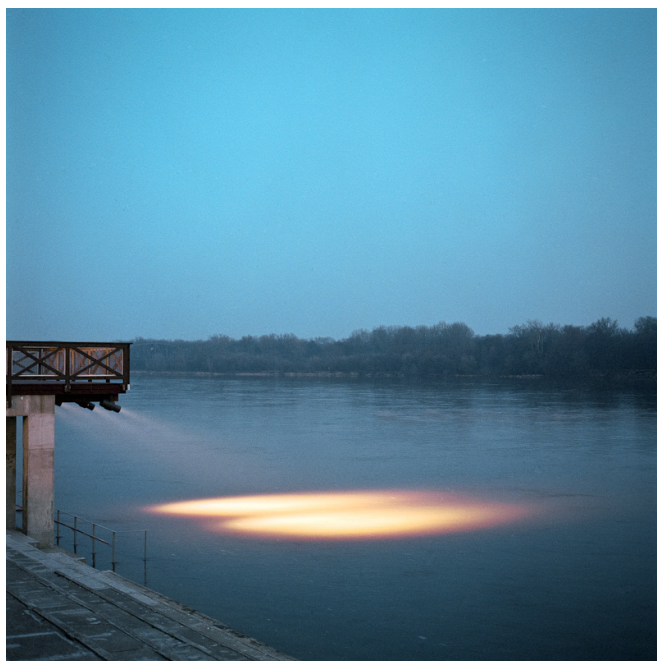
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# **Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska, *Zapamiętane w krajobrazie. Krajobraz kulturowy czesko- niemieckiego pogranicza w czasach przemian*, Scholar, Warsaw 2017 Book review**

**Mateusz Salwa**

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Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska's book *Zapamiętane w krajobrazie. Krajobraz kulturowy czesko-niemieckiego pogranicza w czasach przemian* (*The Memory of Landscape: The Cultural Landscape of Czech-German Borderland in a Time of Change*) is the culmination of her field work conducted in 2012-2014 in Dolní Žandov, a small town in the northwest of the Czech Republic, located near the border with Germany. Ćwiek-Rogalska interpreted the data—ranging from archived information to oral histories—using concepts borrowed from various disciplines. Her intention was to describe and analyze the changes that the cultural landscape of Dolní Žandov and the surrounding area have undergone since 1918.

The reason she opted for what she terms a “microperspective” was the fact that the town is located in the Czech borderland (*pohraničí*), a region so culturally different from other border regions that one cannot compare it to them. Dolní Žandov owes its distinct character to its complex and sometimes even turbulent history, which may strike one as odd given its current “look,” typical for small, peaceful towns located a little bit off the beaten track and overshadowed by renowned nearby locations (Mariánské Lázně in this case).

*Pohraničí* is a region where deep cultural changes were triggered throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century by global political and social processes. Until 1918, that is, until the Czech Republic was born, Dolní Žandov (Unter Sandau) belonged to Prussia and hence German was still the mother tongue of the majority of its inhabitants during

the interwar period. Between 1946 and 1948, the members of the German-speaking community were expatriated and replaced by various ethnic groups arriving from the Bohemian and Slovakian hinterland.

In her book, Ćwiek-Rogalska studies how these cultural changes left their marks on the landscape. She is mainly interested in—as she states—“places where one may observe this intriguing moment of rupture thanks to which German-speaking culture, still visible in the layers of landscape, meets the relatively fresh Czech culture” (13). Dolní Žandov turns out to be an “involuntary monument” (the author borrows this term from Alois Riegl) of subsequent historical epochs that left their traces through the intentional and unintentional actions of generations of the town’s inhabitants. The ever-changing relationships between Czechs and Germans and consequent tensions between “the Czech,” “the German,” “the non-Czech,” and “the non-German” (epitomized in the still living idea of “the post-German”) form a conceptual matrix that the author uses in order to read the landscape as a part and background of the contemporary everyday life of people living in the town. Thus, Ćwiek-Rogalska offers a local perspective that nevertheless allows her to raise more general questions concerning material traces and documents of the historical politics and memory that are inscribed in the landscape.

*The Memory of Landscape* is the result of an interdisciplinary approach that is evidenced mainly by a broad spectrum of theories that are combined by the author in such a way as to offer a conceptual framework for her interpretations of the material collected during her field work: on the one hand her interpretations are based on archives, on the other—on interviews. Ćwiek-Rogalska makes a lot of effort to present her methodology (chapters 1 and 2, i.e., the first part of the book), explicitly stating her assumptions together with their limitations and describing what her field work consisted of and the factors it was conditioned by. She also pays much attention to her position as a researcher and gives an interesting account of the linguistic problems she had to face. These issues, she underlines, are of primary importance because they prevent anyone from approaching the *pohraniči* people’s experiences from a general point of view and from comparing them to the experiences of groups inhabiting borderlands elsewhere. A part of one of the initial chapters is devoted to the concept of landscape that Ćwiek-Rogalska defines in accord with the majority of contemporary approaches as a “place” where culture and nature meet. However, she is more focused on the fact that the landscape is a space where the material reality that may be experienced here and now is fused with the past—that is, with that which is gone and only remembered. In this sense, the landscape of Dolní Žandov is above all a landscape of individual and collective memory, and hence the significance of the questions she wants to answer: who remembers and when? What is remembered and why? Which places generate memories? What determines the way the landscape of *pohraniči* is experienced besides memories?

The second part of the book contains analyses of the landscape of Dolní Žandov. In chapter 3, “Dolní Žandov — Unter Sandau (1918-1938),” the author’s argument concerns a key question “what language do we use when we talk about a landscape?” (45). The linguistic conflict determining the perception of the landscape by the past and present inhabitants of the town is shown with reference to the monument honoring the soldiers who fell during the First World War and the two buildings that used to house a Czech primary school and a German kindergarten. The monument—of which only one element has been preserved (a stone lion) and which has been recently appropriated placed as an ornament in a private garden—is noteworthy as its inexistent materiality is a good illustration of the peculiarity of *pohraničí*. On the one hand it is—or rather, was—a palimpsest: initially founded as a monument to the fallen soldiers of the war between Prussia and Austria in 1866, in 1914 was turned into a monument to German soldiers killed during the First World War, then after the Second World War was demolished and its parts were reused in order to erect a monument for soldiers of the Red Army, which has not survived either. At present there is yet another monument in the town, its inscription reads “We shall remain faithful” and is dedicated to Czech soldiers. On the other hand, even though these monuments no longer exist are inexistent, they are somewhat present in the inhabitants’ memory, self-imposing one on another in a manner that has little to do with their history. The building of the Czech school and that of the German kindergarten are presented by Ćwiek-Rogalska as motives discussed in two private memoirs written by, respectively, a Czech and a German. These documents contain two different narratives on Dolní Žandov—the former shows the local development of Czech culture, and the latter proves the century-long German tradition of the city. As a result, they offer not so much two divergent perspectives on the same place as they do evidence of the fact that the same space was experienced as two totally different environments.

The following chapter, entitled “Dolní Žandov → Unter Sandau → Dolní Žandov (1938-1948),” is an attempt at answering the question of whom does the landscape belong to economically and emotionally. The author focuses on the changes in the population of the town that were a direct consequence of the sequestration of Jewish possessions by Nazi authorities, forced departures of Jewish inhabitants, displacements of Czech citizens, arrivals and then expulsions of German settlers, voluntary departures of Czechs in the 40s, and finally of the intense nationalization of the land. Ćwiek-Rogalska looks into the personal histories of the inhabitants of selected houses as well as the histories of the houses themselves. She also sheds light on the history of the history of a former training camp for young Germans which later served as a temporary detention site for Nazis and expelled Germans. Her research is based on historical sources as well as interviews with the inhabitants.

Chapter 5, “Dolní Žandov (Unter Sandau) 1948-2014,” is devoted to the post-war history of the town. It is in this chapter that Ćwiek-Rogalska’s argument is most



consistently based on her reading of landscape since she focuses on national farming economy therein (she claims that collectivization was a “landscaping power,” borrowing the term from Petr Hájek, a Czech cultural studies scholar) as well as on the frontier and its military infrastructure, which is so typical for borderlands. The proximity of the frontier resulted in a particular land management strategy during communism and the particular “look” of the region after the fall of the iron curtain when innumerable cheap markets targeted at Germans were established. The role and the place—both real and imaginary—of the border in *pohraničí* allow the author to discuss how the character of the area of Dolní Žandov has changed over the past one hundred years from “co-existent borderlands,” “alienated borderlands,” and “interdependent borderlands” to “integrated borderlands” (121-122). Ćwiek-Rogalska notes that in principle the frontier hardly exists these days, yet it is vividly present in personal and collective memory, where it melts with various recollections of everyday life in the second half of the 20th century.

The third part of the book contains a number of case studies of carefully selected “elements” of the landscape of Dolní Žandov. Chapter 6 is on ruins, that is—quoting its title—“on what there is not.” The idea of ruins recurs in the inhabitant’s statements and seems to be an indispensable key to understanding the landscape as particular surroundings experienced by the people living there. The author draws an interesting conclusion concerning the concept of ruin: “it turns out that a ruin does not have to be something that really exists in the landscape. An equally important role is played by all that which left a mark in the memory of the interlocutors—it also exists in a way. As one can see, the cultural landscape is to be understood here as an intersection of time (memory) and place (landscape)” (146).

In chapter 7, “Sacrum: Local Interpretations and Global Meanings,” the histories of a local chapel, of the church, and of the cemetery are presented. The cemetery, being a piece of vernacular landscape architecture, clearly proves how the subsequent “ethnic” layers of the landscape covered one another, contributing to the shape of the current palimpsest: even if the tomb stones of German inhabitants were destroyed in an act of erasure of Teutonic traces, the bodies remained intact and are still where they had been buried. One could say that they have become one with the Czech soil.

The last chapter of the book is devoted to Dolní Žandov as a health resort. The contemporary inhabitants of the city still remember that it used to have this function but treat this aspect of the history of their town dismissively (according to the opinion of many interviewees, it is Mariánské Lázně that is a spa *par excellence*). Here Ćwiek-Rogalska’s argument is based on the biographies of two doctors; both were German-speaking, lived there before the WW2, and were allowed to stay and continue their work afterwards. The memory that one of them once occupied one of the preserved buildings is still alive while his former house still serves as a landmark in the local topography.

The concluding remarks are a thought-provoking methodological *coda* closing the theoretical argument offered in the opening chapters of the book. Ćwiek-Rogalska claims that “the cultural landscape has a disturbing ontology as everything that is imagined and remembered is as real as—sometimes even more real than—that which is physically still present” (191). What, then, counts is not only what is remembered and how, but also the manner in which one talks about it. Additionally, the landscape may be said to co-create the physical presence of things to the same extent as it contributes to everything that is missing and as such present only in the inhabitant’s memories, stories, and ways of seeing.

The author offers two important and inspiring thoughts that stem from her research in Dolní Žandov but which at the same time have a much broader significance reaching beyond the topic of her book. Firstly, the local chronology of the landscape is, Ćwiek-Rogalska states, essentially different from that of politics. As a consequence, an analysis of the landscape allows one to reevaluate global political events and processes as observed from a particular “viewpoint.” Secondly, she believes that removing the material elements of a landscape is not always decisive for its identity: the past landscape is “sustained” in memory and imagination and passes from one generation to another and hence determines the way a landscape looks and feels at present.

Summing up, Ćwiek-Rogalska’s book is an excellent example of a well-done combination of field work with a theoretical perspective. As a consequence, its readers may get acquainted with the history of Dolní Žandov and its area, which otherwise would have most probably passed unnoticed as banal, peripheral, and insignificant. At the same time, they are offered enough food for thought as the book raises important questions, such as whether it is possible to offer a consistent narrative on a cultural landscape given that the landscape itself is full of cracks and tensions and is experienced as incongruous by its inhabitants. Another issue raised by Ćwiek-Rogalska is to what extent a textual approach in research on the history of cultural landscapes is inevitable. Even though the author has done a lot of field work and extensively cites her notes taken “on the spot,” declaring that the landscape is active and performative, she looks at it with the help of written or spoken texts. Consequently, she is mainly focused on the landscape as something that may be apprehended only indirectly through the experience of its past and present inhabitants. The above remark is not so much a criticism as an account of her approach, which leads me to the following questions: is her methodology not the only possible solution in research on cultural landscape as an inhabited landscape? Even if we claim that the landscape is active, are we, as researchers, not forced to experience its agency only through other people’s experiences, no matter whether past or present, that inevitably have to be communicated to us verbally? Given that the word reveals the landscape inasmuch as it conceals it, any research has as its object a representation of a landscape and not the landscape itself.

