

# Contemporary Meaning of European Landscape

**Raffaele Milani**

University of Bologna, Italy

Diogenes

59(1–2) 73–83

Copyright © ICPHS 2013

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0392192113496751

dio.sagepub.com



## What the landscape was: Philosophical ideas and artistic representations

We will start by considering what constituted the landscape in line with a twentieth-century interpretation of the roots of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Every epoch and every civilisation has derived its particular sense of landscape from its own cultural point of view. In ancient Greece humanity and nature were united through a mentality that integrated magical and animist concepts, a unity that in medieval Europe was expressed through the Christian idea of transcendence. In the modern age, on the other hand, the separation of man from nature has led to the invention of what I understand as landscape through the development of the gaze as determined by science and the history of art. The latter has passed through various stages. Burckhardt correctly located the aesthetic discovery of the landscape in the Italian Renaissance. In terms of the graphic representation of space, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries maps were still to be found that represented mountains or lakes with a certain optical distortion, as though these were subjective impressions (the distortions were subsequently corrected by means of photography and other scientific methods). Yet, despite everything, landscape appears in our consciousness to transcend time and such distinctions as these when it is thought of as embracing a living nature. Though we cannot overlook the importance of history, language and culture, the physiognomy that characterises the picturesque – as an expression of place, physical entities, memory and feeling – always appears as an absolute. Even the fleeting sentiment tied to a particular manifestation of natural beauty always appears to us as a vivid experience identifiable with the universal *en kai pan* (identity of the individual with the whole). Thus this feeling is common to both past and future.

We are also inclined to think that the spiritual union of the visible with our state of mind, which Rehder discusses, occurs spontaneously in human beings. The landscape is a spiritual form in which vision and creativity come together, because each act of seeing creates an ‘ideal landscape’ within the viewer. Our ancient forebears have transformed our capacity to see and to feel on the basis of a

---

### Corresponding author:

Raffaele Milani, Dipartimento di Filosofia, Università di Bologna, via Zamboni 38, 40124 Bologna, Italy.

Email: milani@philo.unibo.it

shared awareness: that of our participation in the life of the world. This is the unifying mental process of the aesthetic experience, something that is sensed immediately both in the act of seeing and feeling. Simmel summarised this spiritual response in the early twentieth century, calling it the *Stimmung* (tonality of atmosphere) of the landscape. Following Schlegel's transcending of the distinction between *physis* and *psyche* (*Berliner Vorlesungen*, 1801–02), Simmel analysed the affective gradations stimulated by the perception of distance and light. The different phenomena of perception form a unity whose primary property comprises the range of nuances possible in a psychological response that proceed from the realm of emotions to that of art and from the realm of perception to that of intuition (Simmel, 1912–13). Normally we behave like artists, albeit in a less technical sense, when we observe and select objects creatively. Landscape is understood and interpreted in terms consistent with our image of the world. This same spirit of originality leads us from the aesthetic to the artistic. He writes: 'When we no longer see a landscape as the sum of many individual natural objects, we have a work of art in the making.' The *Stimmung* of the landscape has two meanings in modern times: the ideal of the infinite in the sensibility of the Romantics and the scientific investigations of Humboldt. For Humboldt the features of the landscape, the outline of the mountains, the mists in the atmosphere, the darkness of the woods, the torrents crashing among the crags, all have an ancient and mysterious relationship with the pleasure life of human beings.

In Klages (1973), we find an emotional defence of nature and a criticism of the destruction brought about by progress. He suggests that change can only occur within the human soul and not in the political sphere. Furthermore he deplores the disappearance of the original delight in landscape when earth, clouds, waters, flora and fauna formed a 'suggestive whole that enveloped the life of the individual as if he were inside an ark floating in the grandeur of the universe'. These words shed light on the depth of the human spirit.

A 'critique of seeing' stems from our meditation on the ancient and the modern, and the productive activity of gardening and cultivation. This critique is based on answering the question: is it I who activate the beauty of the things around me or is it that the things reveal their beauty independently of me? From the eighteenth century onward, this question has been answered through a series of terms designating the categories of taste: beauty, grace, the sublime, the picturesque, the *je ne sais quoi*, and the neo-Gothic. Together with such great stylistic models as Classicism, Baroque, Rococo and Romanticism, these complex notions are closely tied to the perception of the landscape in its aesthetic dimension and our feeling for nature. In fact, every landscape is a property of humans through their activity as free creators who modify, construct and transform the physical world by means of their talent, imagination and technology.

Landscape itself can be thought of as the product of art, an effect of free human action and feeling; landscape, according to Ritter (1963), is a manifestation of human freedom in nature. But that author also emphasises the epiphanic aspect of the *vista* as the manifestation of nature for the purpose of contemplation. Outside of history, where technical transformation prevails, humankind can recover a lost unity once utilitarian functions are exhausted. He states that 'sacred' nature has become a 'lost' nature. In the quest to recover these lost values, he does not propose a return to the naivety of the ancients but a unity achievable through the aesthetic mediation of poetry and the figurative arts, as well as the awareness of the rupture (*Entzweiung*) between humankind and nature, as recorded by scientific observation and the perspective revolution in painting from the fifteenth century onward. For Ritter, the landscape is a universal concept, invented by modernity for modernity, fused with the theory of the cosmos, beyond any notion of hegemony and subjugation, beyond the metaphor of the Ptolemaic system (nature as landscape) and the Copernican (nature as the object of scientific study). During the Enlightenment, this was the tenor of thought of the early landscape theorists such as Hirschfeld and Girardin.

The reality we see is not merely aesthetic; it is also ethical. Inspired by Spranger's theory of the morphology of culture, Schwind (1950) argued that the landscape is a work of art comparable to any other human creation, but it is much more complex. While a painter paints a painting and a poet writes a poem, an entire people creates a landscape that is the reservoir of its culture and contains the imprint of its spirit. In so arguing, Schwind has kept in mind the unifying element that ensures continuity across different epochs. From the time of Herodotus, the issue has not been one of describing an actual portion of the earth's surface but rather an *ecumene* that embraces people and culture. As Kerényi (1937) also argues, the spirit seeks out the landscape; between them there is a kinship. Nature and culture interpenetrate each other in the sense that the natural *vista* informs and inspires the creative act. Reinterpreting the categories of emotional response (*Ergriffenheit*) formulated by Frobenius, Kerényi explains that such a state of mind allows us to eliminate distance and bring ourselves near to the past that lies concealed in the landscape and thus to embrace the distant memory of mythological figures.

## The development of aesthetic appreciation

It is commonly argued that landscape is a wholly modern concept, tied to the development of painting from the Renaissance onward; likewise it is conceived of as closely linked to scientific discoveries and the aesthetic experience of travel. As a result, we have landscapes that are pictorial, literary, geographic and imaginary. These initial observations thus project landscape as a cultural construct or a historical invention on the part of artists, an idea that was to continue up to the nineteenth century – something between the art of garden design and *Land Art*, as suggested by Roger (1997). However, the aesthetic problem of landscape cannot be explained solely in terms of the landscape as an object of artistic representation. We must take into account the relationship between humanity and nature within the complex pattern of human experience itself. In this regard, landscape is a relative and dynamic entity wherein, from antiquity up to the present day, nature and society, the gaze and the object of the gaze, constantly interact. The observing act is decidedly modern, but what the observing indicates may well be ancient.

This leads us to consider the evolution of aesthetic appreciation. The last three centuries have seen the development of techniques of observation to which there correspond a variety of poetics. The evolution of painting, photography and cinema has accustomed our eyes to assimilating these ways of presenting or representing the landscape as an aesthetic object. Yet this is just a modern manifestation of an ancient disposition.

While undertaking the Grand Tour that was the fashion of the early eighteenth century, young English gentlemen were fascinated by crumbling ruins that appeared shrouded in mystery and collected mental images of them like connoisseurs of art. They were sustained in this process by an exalted imagination. Their observation of ruins, rock formations, mountain vistas or stormy seas induced these individuals to compose sentimental images of them in the same way that a painter might frame a scene using a window and its borders to highlight a particular object. This was one way of aesthetically enlivening monuments and parts of nature chosen to form a grand catalogue, a sort of reliquary of aesthetic pleasure. Framing was also a technique for evoking them nostalgically. All later travel enthusiasts were influenced by this same aesthetic taste. The principles of composition used reflected the techniques applied in painting, which were eventually passed on to photography and cinema. These gentlemen travellers, however, brought with them and reflected upon their formal study of painting. Unquestionably they had the great landscape paintings of the seventeenth century in mind, which may well have exerted an impact on the subconscious level of their perceptions. But they were also influenced by the discovery of the

window as an instrument through which to see the world, especially the way it was applied by the Flemish masters. When used in paintings, which can be thought of as windows on the world, the window exerts a sort of dual effect, inviting the viewer naturally into the landscape by breaking down the three-dimensional image of traditional perspective. This was an important discovery (along with the effect of the mirror image) by the Flemish school, even if it is not entirely clear that it transformed the countryside represented into landscape, as Roger claims. As a device used to isolate parts of the surrounding world, this mode of representation also increased the aesthetic value of that surrounding world. Eighteenth-century *amateurs* transferred this optical technique from painting to the general realm of the aesthetic and made it exotic and sentimental. The window on the landscape (the frame and cross that sometimes divides the space depicted) becomes almost a stereotype of romantic painting as well as of many literary descriptions that came later.

The technique of the frame and window implies a view, that is to say, the reproduction of a defined aspect of the natural world. *Vista* is a term that refers to the depiction of a site through application of perspective, which is the instrument by means of which reality is understood and reproduced. Despite the fact that the method of *vedutismo* representation varied, the scene represented itself developed over four centuries effectively from one basic assumption: it is the mental image of an external reality perceived through rational laws. This means that there is not always a clear-cut distinction between *vedutisti* and landscape painters or between *vedutismo*, which is associated largely with the eighteenth century, and landscape painting more directly expressing universal themes of a nature perceived as more or less wild. In fact, alongside the better-known Van Wittel, Panini, Piranesi, Marieschi, Canaletto, Bellotto, and Guardi, the *vedutisti* are at heart the first English travellers to Italy, as well as de Saint-Non, Hoüel, Hackert, Knight, Vivant Denon, Goethe, Schinkel, and others who followed them. It is the sentimental journey of the Grand Tour that provides the passion for the panoramic *vista*. Reality is organised as an immense repertoire of antiquarian taste.

## Contemporary meanings of landscape: aesthetics, ethics, politics

What is the significance of the contemporary landscape? After the pleasure of natural beauty, antiquarian taste, sentiment and the *aura*, the most recent contribution of aesthetics is the desire to transform the political to the aesthetic realm and vice versa. Impelled by the fortuitous shock of events of the twentieth century, aesthetics has sought to promote, through the mass media, a new immaterial corporality, to be ranged alongside sensibility and a new flexibility of contact between distant countries. This development no longer equates simply to exoticism or the tradition of citation, but rather to a hybridism where technology, communication, life-style and environment merge. Art, beauty and social life become masks of an aesthetics of the indefinite and ephemeral which in turn absorb the landscape.

The present situation involves evolution and loss of landscape identity. Landscapes have been in constant change ever since human beings first gazed upon the earth. Until the nineteenth century, evolution was generally slow and even imperceptible. Later, this evolution accelerated through industrialisation and urbanisation. In 2008 half the planet's population was living in urban areas. In Europe the percentage has reached a record high of 80 per cent. Nevertheless, populations vary in intensity according to the country in question and there is evidence of a new movement in the opposite direction, of urban dwellers moving to the countryside, both close to the cities and further afield.

With the exception of natural phenomena (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, inland and coastal erosion, etc.) changes in landscapes are the result of human intervention. In the latter half of the twentieth century huge economic and political changes modified the port operations of Marseille, Bordeaux, Nantes, Barcelona, Lisbon, London, Genoa and Naples among others and, in part, the economies of their agricultural hinterlands. Within the European Union with its Common Agricultural Policy, the intensification of production and the modernisation of farming techniques has given rise to a greater agricultural exploitation of land, as well as the disappearance of extensive farming landscapes made up of smallholdings. This has been exacerbated in particular by legislation on land use (amalgamation of smallholdings, large-scale drainage and land reclamation). Since the sixties, especially, coasts and mountains areas that are snow-covered in the winter have been given over to ever-growing tourist and recreational activities. At the same time urban expansion and the building of the road, motorway and rail infrastructures have been followed by the construction of new cities.

The consequences of the changes to the Europe's landscapes are manifold. These differ according to the country and are principally shaped by how each state seeks to regulate the impact of landscape and environment policies (those relating to industry and agriculture development, energy resources, road and rail networks, the tourism building sector). A prominent example of such impacts is that caused by the installation of energy production plants like nuclear power stations and wind energy complexes, as in Denmark, Spain, Germany and France.

Moreover, the transformation of rural landscapes has been characterised by the exploitation of space once occupied by copses, orchards, small vineyards, small chicken farming ranges, etc. which were the familiar reference points in the farming landscape. This tendency, together with the concomitant reduction in the number of agricultural workers, has led to the intensification of farming on land cleared of natural obstacles, to larger properties, and the intensive cultivation of specific crops. The drift towards this type of farming has also given rise to particular forms of greenhouse cultivation or cultivation under huge plastic sheets, as in the alluvial valleys or along the Mediterranean coast, where vast expanses of land are now covered with plastic sheets for the purposes of out-of-season production of fruit and vegetables.

Elsewhere, where natural obstacles prevent mechanisation, farming has regressed or embraced the mindset of protecting so-called conservation areas. In some cases, such as mountain farming, agricultural workers have exploited the advantages of specific production, thereby remaining owners of the land. But those constricted spaces have usually been reforested through state funding.

One of the few exceptions to this tendency is Germany which has successfully maintained at least some of its small-scale farming and traditional practices, while Poland is the only European country where the number of agricultural labourers has increased in recent years, but this is an exceptional case. Economic liberalisation in Poland has excluded many workers from the job market, thereby favouring a return to farming after the manner of the small-holder, even if this is concentrated in a just few areas of the country.

The different ways in which landscapes evolve have three points in common. Governments attempt to bring order to them by pushing through protocols relating to land use. Firstly they endeavour to conserve what is under threat and what belongs to a particular catchment area. Secondly, they attempt to establish a desired state of environmental common good (for example, water quality and security of supply, limitation of natural risks or those tied to human activities). Finally, they seek to conserve, restore and even create landscapes as frameworks for social and economic life, moderated by values of exchange and use. But the acceptance of such protocols depends on how Europeans perceive the territories they live in or visit.

## Varieties of landscapes: the problem of identity

Attitudes also change. The way in which people respond to a remodelling of the landscape is far from simple. Even if beneficial, such changes rarely benefit everyone permanently. Opinions may change as soon as the euphoria of the perceived benefit dies away. Shortly before the Second World War, no-one thought of contesting the construction of motorways in Germany and France, nor subsequently, the destruction of tree-lined roadways, or of the *bocage* (mixed woodland and pastureland) in southern France. The draining of marshland, the erection of giant pylons carrying high-tension electric cables throughout the countryside and the construction of extensive housing complexes to replace slums also went unchallenged. Then, from the sixties onward, the situation went through a complete change. Thanks to timely wake-up calls from scientists throughout the world, and the spread of information on the potentially harmful effects of certain agricultural and industrial technologies on health, food quality, fauna and flora and civil security, people became aware that technological progress could have adverse consequences.

Thus, the twentieth century saw a great change in the way we human beings related to the land about us. Methods of farming and construction along with the ways we perceived and represented the land all contrived to modify our previous notions of landscape. The relationship between cities and countryside together with the distinctive features of each has been significantly modified by the huge expansion of tourism and other significant human interventions.

Landscapes change in parallel with the economic and social forces that govern the environments of which these are an expression. Such changes come about slowly – indeed economists refer to the difficulty of managing them – because they are hampered by the exchange between land ownership rights and the various public policies that seek to act on a local level in the name of general public interest. The countries of Europe are states where the rule of law applies and people cannot simply do as they please. Among the values carried by a particular landscape, in Europe identity occupies a prominent position. Europeans ask themselves to what extent it is necessary to conserve a local landscape's identity. How is this identity to be kept alive or how might it be changed? What is the relationship between identity and aesthetics, the shape of the landscape and how it is perceived?

The identity of a landscape derives from the expression of a dual perception. On the one hand, one landscape may appear identical to another because it is endowed with similar characteristics, organisation and functions. The Italian landscapes of Tuscany resemble those of the French inland regions of Provence (the olives, pines, vineyards and cypresses are the same) and are therefore comparable. On the other hand, the distinctive nature of a particular landscape's identity is indicated by its expression of special identities representing human groups (the landscape of Provence or Tuscany) or by providing an individual identity at local level. Thus, Tuscan landscapes differ from those of Provence in the forms of architecture they embrace, for example, and in the absence of lavender cultivation.

But this second component of a landscape's identity is not eternal. It may fade away if those who once knew it disappear without 'passing on the baton'. Such is the case for numerous European pilgrimage sites that have been abandoned, with the significant exception of those leading to Santiago de Compostela, El Rocío in Spain, Fatima in Portugal and Loreto in Italy. This type of near-forgotten landscape includes numerous sites associated with former rural and urban practices within that space: the washerwoman at the village washtubs, the goose woman or goatherd who watched over her goats along the roadside, the pedlar on the doorstep, the knife-grinder in village squares, the milk or cheese vendor, the woodman at work in the woods, the ploughman with his horse- or ox-drawn plough in the fields, as well as religious and secular processions, all picturesque



scenes that, up till fifty years ago, served to identify places. Certainly, some of these today are sometimes restored or reinvented (e.g. the communal washhouse, the *bories* (dry-stone shelters) of Provence or the *trulli* (conical dry-stone houses) of Apulia). But description and image may fade from memory.

Ultimately, a landscape identity is something that can be created or recreated. It is the role of landscape professionals to bring attention to what has been overlooked, restoring its local or supra-local meaning, and pointing out environmental, economic and social dysfunction. Such applies to those landscapes where windmills and water mills have since the nineteenth century been abandoned or destroyed. For the past few decades, such representative features of past landscapes have had their life and meaning restored by associations, university researchers and private individuals, often with a tourist or recreational aim. In less nostalgic fashion, the creative architectural landscapes presented by new TGV stations (Avignon or Aix-en-Provence), new public squares in Berlin, the Musée des Arts Premiers on the quai Branly in Paris and the Madrid central station all boast new identities, and which are likely to attract admirers long into the future.

It seems that people will always be motivated to seek both individual and collective landscape identities. Among the influential factors are the distinguishing traits of one landscape compared to another. What differentiates one landscape from another provides a basis for the characteristics of landscapes and places. These are important reference points during periods of social or personal crisis (uprooting/rootedness). Yet such characteristics do not escape the effects of fashion, neither are they independent of the conditions of the physical and social environment where people live.

However, this quest for identity is disputable and even dangerous because it may stifle any idea of change, difference and innovation. The recent wars in the Balkans are a case in point; there, various communities appealed to an identity based on land and landscape, but those appeals only exacerbated tensions between rival groups claiming affinity with the same landscape.

Not only have the shapes and constitutive elements of landscape changed, but also its biophysical and social functioning. These ecological and social aspects are not unanimously recognised: some schools of thought have in fact denied that landscapes possess an ecological and social dimension, recognising instead only their aesthetic worth. But it is generally held that landscape does comprise all these aspects. Judging from the numerous surveys carried out in various fields, as far as most people are concerned, landscape implies beauty or harmony, even though this may not be limited to an aesthetic meaning: harmony is also the relationship that humankind should have with nature, in a positive acceptance of the expression. It relates, moreover, to the climate that it is felt individuals should establish amongst one another. In fact, a beautiful landscape – the beautiful landscape as defined *a priori*, cannot in principle be a polluted landscape or a landscape of social conflict.

Yet a blighted beauty is deprecated not only for its formal aspects. A landscape is debased when it cannot be considered harmonious in its ecological functioning or if it presents aspects that allow social problems, like violence and social segregation, to emerge. For example, an urban landscape in the suburbs is not only debased because it is graceless in appearance, but also because of its associations with poverty, delinquency, unemployment or pollution.

As the landscape in Europe has evolved, whether slowly or rapidly, in recent times, and with the threat that its extraordinary diversity and wealth may be reduced, the profits offered by tourism have become more and more dependent on visits paid to the most famous landscape sites. With only local interest in less well-known sites, it is tempting to eternalise landscapes in museums or to transmute them into grand nature restoration projects.

Museum-cities are already in existence: the Italian town of San Gimignano, looked over by its thirteen towers, has become an inevitable beacon of attraction for tourism in Tuscany. Another

example is Tuscania in Latium. With the exception of its tourist shops, the town is largely deserted. In France, the eighteenth-century village of Brouage, in the Charente marshland, was at risk of becoming a ghost town but it has been revived thanks to regional and national tourism over the past fifteen years. The town of Covarrubias in Spain is another case in point. Supported by the tourist economy, these increasingly numerous places in Europe are centres of recreation; the architecture of memory is organised for visits while employment is tied to tourist spending (hotels, restaurants, antique shops, boutiques, etc.). These centres are monuments, one might even say temples, that immortalise the memory of sites for commercial ends.

Similarly, sectors of countryside can become open-air museums. This is more difficult than is the case for the built-up environment, because there can be no countryside (or at least very little) without the farmers who cultivate the fields or breed livestock. In European rural conservation areas, where the commitment to the preservation of identity based on heritage is pronounced, there is a tendency to integrate portions of countryside into museums while maintaining their environmental and even agricultural functions and even introducing new uses.

If these traditional rural spaces have been used in a particular historical moment as models or sources of inspiration for various artists, we still speak of them as cultural landscape (*Kulturlandschaft*). The desire on the part of local people to preserve landscapes, such as meadows, for ecological reasons, justifies the use of conservational farming techniques such as non-intensive pasturage or haymaking, thereby excluding opportunities for more economic agricultural exploitation. Thus landscape remains agricultural yet is stripped of genuinely productive farmers.

### *Natura naturans, natura naturata*

The expression *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* were revived a few years ago by Dufrenne, in defence of a renewed philosophy of nature. Dufrenne does not interpret the double expression in a metaphysical sense, the realm to which it had been historically relegated, given that humankind and nature appeared to be both separate and joined at the same time. In this context of relationship and difference, he states that without the notion of *homo artifex* – that humankind participates in the world through work – we cannot assert the image of *natura artifex*, an illusion which would totally exclude humankind. Our concept of nature is the product of culture and history. Thus, *natura artifex* appears as a construct of both the natural and the artificial, positioned between nature and art. This *natura* extends to the integration of proto-industrial architecture within the urban landscape; something previously seen as unnatural, once its technical and social role had been terminated, could be henceforth included within the aesthetic paradigms of the new urban landscape.

*Natura naturans* and *natura naturata* were and are at the centre of the creative act in relation to the process of moulding and imitating, of truth and artifice. In the case of art we mean here the art of creating urban and agrarian landscape, the arts of the community and of individuals who, imitating nature, act as *naturantes* through the ‘genius’ that this same nature grafts onto our minds. And by the term *naturata*, we designate a nature that is deeply rooted in our consciousness, a world that belongs to us. Thus it behoves humankind – following the thinking of Dufrenne, who equally reflects the thought of Simmel, Schwind and Straus – to live nature as world, to generate the possible which is suggested in the real. In this sense humankind is both the subject and the object of the power of nature. Nature, art and culture come together in landscape. The picturesqueness that belonged to the theories of Rousseau, Kant, Goethe and Simmel is no longer a model. Humankind is at the centre, no longer and not only of representations, but of these forces that unceasingly change.



However, this discussion should be viewed alongside the ‘non-place’ theory of Marc Augé (*non-lieux*). Between these two opposite positions there is a bridge and in the space between the two ends we note what remains of that taste that historically formed an aesthetics of landscape, both natural and urban, based on its theory of the gaze – a theory established by precise ways of seeing. This gaze embraced three aspects: the *belvedere*, the frame and the *veduta* as is already manifest in the visual and spatial arts, including photography, and painterly cinema. If we position ourselves in the interpretative space between Dufrenne and Augé, the fall of the picturesque and the advance of the planned becomes visible, while the utopian, with its Renaissance memory rooted in Europe, is no longer observable. If from this position we consider the impact of urbanisation on the world, the phenomenon of globalisation and worldwide sensory overload, it is clear that Europe will cease to exist. Its aesthetic values and tenets of taste have become effaced. The deaths of the Renaissance, Baroque, picturesque and Romantic worlds, together with their final expressions in the twentieth century on the one hand, and our exposure to a virtual universe whose images and messages constantly bombard us and imprison our minds on the other, all generate blindness. Basically, we see too many things and this equates to seeing nothing. This signifies the end of the contemplation of the *aura* – both that of the medieval mystics and of Rousseau. Amidst the rubble of European civilisation, and the smoke of sacrificial fires that rises up everywhere from Western centres of artistic thought and civilisation, taste is taking a new and contorted form: a manifest pleasure in disorientation, a loss of centre, an identity of uniformity induced by globalisation. As a result of the crisis of the city some architects have created hybrid materials and forms; the decline in environmental compatibility in the globalised urban spread has resulted in the invention of vertical gardens. Within such *non-places*, the eccentricities of celebrities flourish. Examples are manifold across the world.

We leave connection and context behind, instead concentrating on the architectonic object that we see rising up from a uniform concrete sprawl. It is the contemporary ‘city’, containing as it does half the world’s population, that gobbles up resources, both material and immaterial. From both an aesthetic as well as anthropological and political viewpoint this is an existential challenge facing us. It is as though the geography that links the city and the surrounding landscape-nature is decaying, with the intermediate tracts of land ready to be devoured by new urban annexations.

## Towards new forms of landscape

Thus the new aesthetics of landscape can be positioned between conservatism and modernism which continue to pursue each other in history: a struggle that rarely produces armistices or peaceful co-existence. The famous architects of the metropolis have long assumed the right to build, thereby claiming the freedom of modernism, and now they aim to enter historic cities to deconstruct the harmonious equilibrium, as witnessed in the variety of styles assembled over the centuries. The pursuit of the shock-effect is now the prevailing orthodoxy. For their part, the landscape conservationists, motivated by appropriateness and conformity according to the principles of relationship and a non-invasive idea of land exploitation, seek to organise the various strata of the history of the art of the landscape (cultivation, tree planting etc.) thereby re-establishing the traditional techniques of restoration. So cities are sited opposite large protected natural parks and conservation areas. The area of land under such protection is increasing. The new aesthetics will reflect human sensibilities and corporeity that offer two solutions which are nearly always set in opposition one with the other: on the one hand large parks and protected areas, while on the other massive conurbations that will govern both new and old constructions. Building methods will also differ, from those reflecting the so-called death of art – a disintegration of any aesthetic principle

of metropolitan life in the face of new technology, to on the other hand a revival of methods reflecting an appreciation of nature and the perception of its beauty. However, some cities achieve an emblematic status in an attempt at reconciliation between the artificial and natural. Within their extensive green zones, considerable spatial volumes are created, whereas the historic cities – often devastated repositories of memory – enclosed in the suffocating magma of urban sprawl, seek a harmony with what is just out of reach: airy parks and protected areas accessible through long green paths.

Beauty is taking on new forms. Artists and philosophers are attempting to make sense of this struggle. While the traditional aesthetic categories may be waning, they still serve to draw attention to virtuality and pleasure in sameness. From what may be observed from contemporary architecture and urban planning, the world is venturing into a *poesis* devoid of feeling and passion – one embracing a continuity of postmodernist excess in an explosive mixture of high technology and luxuriant green. The world of Hundertwasser, Patrick Blanc's botanical compositions, Emilio Ambasz's 'green' constructions and Edouard François's façades are representative of this cloning and holographic spirit, as indeed are Terunobu Fujimori's vegetable plots and Rem Koolhaas's Singapore Songlines. Thus the landscape in both its urban and natural expressions is converted into ephemeral adventure by art, an echo of the earth and its elements.

## References

- Assunto, R (1973) *Il paesaggio e l'estetica*. Naples: Giannini.
- Augé, M (1992) *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. Paris: Seuil.
- Augé, M (1994) *Les Sens des autres*. Paris: Fayard.
- Augé, M (2009) *Pour une anthropologie de la mobilité*. Paris: Payot.
- Baridon, M (2006) *Naissance et Renaissance du paysage*. Arles: Actes Sud.
- Burke, E (1990) *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful [1757–59]*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Burnet, Th (1699) *Theoria sacra Telluris*. Amsterdam: J Walters.
- Clark, K (1976) *Landscape into Art*. London: John Murray.
- Clément, G (2004) *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage*. Paris: Sujet/Objet.
- Curtius, E R (1948) *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*. Bern: A Francke.
- Dufrenne, M (1989) 'Le Cap Ferrat', *Revue d'Esthétique*, 16: 57–60.
- Goethe, J W von (2006) *Theory of colours [1810]*, transl. Ch L Eastlake. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Heidegger, M (1992) *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte Probleme der Logik [(1936–37)]*. Frankfurt am Main: V Klostermann.
- Kant, I (2008) *Critique of judgement [1790]*, trans. J Creed Meredith, rev, ed and introduced by N Walker. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Kant, E (1991) *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Kerényi, K (1980) "'Landschaft und Geist", Apollon und Niobe', in *Werke* IV: 80–92. Munich/Wien: Langen/Müller.
- Klages, L (1973) *Mensch und Erde*. Stuttgart: Kröner.
- La Cecla, F (2008) *Contro l'architettura*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri.
- Milani, R (2009) *The Art of the Landscape*. Montreal/Londres/Ithaca: McGill/Queen's UP.
- Panofsky, E (1936) 'Et in Arcadia Ego. On the Conception of Transience in Poussin and Watteau', in R Klibansky and H J Paton (eds) *Philosophy and History. Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer*, pp. 223–254. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Rheder, H (1932) *Die Philosophie der unendlichen Landschaft*. Halle/Saale: M Niemeyer.
- Rilke, R M (1903) *Worpswede: Fritz Mackensen, Otto Modersohn, Fritz Overbeck, Hans am Ende, Heinrich Vogeler*. Bielefeld: Velhagen & Klasing.

- Ritter, J (1963) *Landschaft. Zur Funktion des Aesthetischen in der modernen Gesellschaft*. Munster: Aschendorff.
- Roger, A (1997) *Court traité du paysage*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Romano, G (1991) *Studi sul paesaggio. Storia e immagini*. Turin: Einaudi.
- Romano, M (1993) *L'estetica della città europea. Forma e immagini*. Turin: Einaudi.
- Rousseau, J J (1964) *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Rousseau, J J (1968) *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Paris: Garnier.
- Rousseau, J J (1980) *Fragments de botanique*, dans *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4. Paris: Gallimard.
- Rousseau, J J (1999) *Institutions chimiques* [1745], texte revised by B Bernardi and B Bensaude Vincent. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard.
- Ruskin, J (1843–60) *Modern Painters*. London: Allen, Green and Co.
- Schama, S (1995) *Landscape and Memory*. London: Fontana Press.
- Schelling, F (1983) *Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Schopenhauer, A (2010) *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. J Norman, A Welchman, C Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Schwind, M (1950) 'Sinn und Ausdruck der Landschaft', *Studium generale*, 3(4–5): 196–201.
- Shaftesbury, A A C (1999) 'The Moralists', in Ph Eyres (ed.) *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Simmel, G (1912–13) 'Philosophie der Landschaft', *Die Gùldenammer. Norddeutsche Monatshefte*, 3: 635–644.
- Straus, E (1956) *Vom Sinn der Sinne. Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der Psychologie*. Berlin: Springer.
- Virilio, P (2004) *Ville panique*. Paris: Galilée.
- Wittkower, R (1974) *Palladio and English Palladianism*. London: Thames and Hudson.