

THE ATTRIBUTE OF *NATURAL* AS STARTING POINT FOR LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY. DEBATE ON ITS GEOGRAPHICAL, LINGUISTIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND HERMENEUTICAL APPROACHES

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Abstract: The study explores the relationship nature-individual in terms of landscape diversity, after passing through a conceptual filter. The filter is determined by the attribute of *natural* referring generally and factually to landscapes. The inputs of matter, energy and information are engaged both in the morpho-structural aspects of landscapes and in the environmental behaviour (following nature's course or man-induced) of landscape components. The result is the diversity of landscapes expressed in different states of naturalness. There is an inescapable diversity of the natural of landscapes in the linguistic dimension, conveyed both by amateurs and by the specialists. When the natural is present in form of some components, people tend to extrapolate the interpretation of the naturalness of that landscape, without the reality showing it through inventory and functioning. An admixture between a variable content of *natural* and of artificial components makes up the dose of *naturalness* of landscapes, correctly called *sub-natural*. The relevance of the study is given by the emphasis on the distancing between the emergence of the syntagma *natural landscape* and its terminological usage. This distancing is bigger than the cleavage between the social assimilation of the word and the society reacting to it in a practical way.

Key words: natural as filter, naturalness, geography, hermeneutic landscape, landscape in linguistic and environmental analysis

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COORDINATES CONFIGURING *THE NATURAL* OF LANDSCAPE. *THE NATURAL* BETWEEN THE STRENGTH OF THE TERM AND THE RELEVANCE OF ITS USE. Nowadays, speaking about the natural of landscapes is at hand both for specialists and amateurs, the word being used in different circumstances. It is precisely such ways of linking up the attribute of *natural* to a space and functional environment, to a vivid ambient (as landscape is) which derive an entire arsenal of terminology and facts. The corollaries range from generating and integrating patterns about the way we speak correctly about a landscape (Mayall and Hall, 2007) up to the way in which we intervene practically, scientifically and economically on that/those landscape(s). The debates moulding our values in viewing the land as *nature* and *natural* are not politically neutral either (Barry and Smith, 2008).

By *natural landscape*, in its classical acceptance and plain expression, it is designated the predominance of that part made of natural elements within the assembly of the landscape we analyse, we compare or we use. Expanding the semantic-philosophical area of what *natural* means in regard to landscape, one may refer to protected environments, to giving priorities to nature, to spaces left freely at nature's hand or in which the economic reasons lessen in front of nature's priorities. This nature, with its *natural* caught up in the restraints imposed by the reserve of biodiversity, is one understood as a static collection of objects or parts other than human being (Cooper, 2000, p. 1134; OFEFP Berne¹, 2003, p. 17).

The consequence is that we refer to a state similar to the equilibrium of a perfect or almost perfect nature within a confined space functioning as landscape which is at display in front of an observer. To such landscape, it is the superior norm of *natural*, a natural apprehended through its components, which commands the landscape not only the mark, the trace, the style, the personality, but also the landscape's conversion in a dialogue and the cohabitation 'view – appreciation' (figure 1). The orientation and difficulty through which we, the observers, appreciate all that befalls with/about the natural in the landscape of reference must also be accounted for.



Figure 1. The dominance of *natural* by rockwall, cavity, young forest flange on the abrupt wall and eutrophic mire, consumes itself in a dialogue with our sight assessing the norm of *natural*, despite the location close to a railway station. Interference landscape unit in Crișul Repede Gorge (north-west of Romania).

We tend to label with ease a scenery as natural, leaving ourselves tricked to the compromise of 'making room' for *the natural* too, a natural situated in the proximity of the artificial. Alternatively, we must accept and limit as *natural* in the landscape only the part which recommends itself through its parameters and its features as being natural. As for the rest, we have at command theoretical and practical instruments in order to speak about a semi-natural quality of landscapes, as the forest mountain ones in Bretagne recommend themselves (Touffet and Clement, 1991).

Objectively speaking, people manifest certain aloofness in apprehending the landscape as landscape 'consumers'. This happens as long as the insertion of some anthropic elements (buildings, communication roads, factories, transportation) is accepted in terms of opinion and in line with environmental urban landscaping, provided that the anthropic elements do not overwhelm the part of natural origin (forests, orchard, water meadow, mountain, running water, lake etc.).

¹ (2003), *Paysage 2020 – Commentaires et programme, Synthèse réalisée pour les principes directeurs «Nature et Paysage»* de l'OFEFP, Berne, www.ocs.polito.it/paesaggio/dwd/strategie/2020commentaires.pdf, pp. 1-51

Restrictiveness, aloofness or lenience regarding the acceptance of the innermost living system of the natural of landscapes. There are known scientific approaches of landscapes which could be labelled as rigorist, pertaining to exceptionalism, with few adepts however, beyond any possible reproach as far as the deviation of the idea of naturalness is concerned. These approaches are valid especially for forest landscapes or for biotic communities (where flora and fauna are majoritary), the natural and quasi-natural ones (Rameau et al., 1996).

The rigorists accept only the transformations exerted by the development of natural factors on landscapes, through tempests, floods, tornadoes, volcanic tectonic processes, succession of droughts, great fires etc. In this respect, the rigorists consider that the simple presence of man brings into scenery the defacement of eco-systemic balance even through ordinary manifestations, which may be regarded as insignificant, such as trotting. These activities can lead to land subsidence on marching paths, voluntary or involuntary severance of plants or branches, setups of fireplaces and small camps for short sojourning, etc. Without being explicitly admitted in the literature on landscape, there are initiatives generated by such theoretical approaches, from which such experiences of rigorous type get through some researches (Jellicoe, quoted by Gambino, 1991).

Our own opinion aims the existence of restricted portions as natural to the highest degree at the level of the Globe. Other opinions view the *natural* as thematic background (intending its functioning and physiognomic reflex) in order to designate the landscapes in polar climatic area (Marin, 2005).

For some specialists, the lenience with which the attribute of *natural* is hall-marked pushes the comprehension of the whole physical-anthropic dualism towards light-mindedness. By the *natural* of landscape, some researchers understand either the relevance of physical conditions against the humanised ones (the sea, the littoral forms, the isles), or much more so, the highlighting of dominant characters of physical components (ex. the vigour or the mild aspect of some topographical forms, the openings of some valleys etc. – Humeau, 1998, p. 1), or the benevolent acquiescence of humanising the rural, which used to be predominantly natural in the past (Gamache et al., 2004). The sequel can be stamped by the recognition of an influential attitude towards nature in which the individual has settled, getting the right cultural acquisitions in the action of mastering and transforming it. The intention of the individual in the landscape includes the cooperative limitation of the intervention to make a ‘pact’, to ‘pacificate’ with nature as exemplified by Lipietz (1994, p. 30): ‘Neither more, nor less *natural*, neither more, nor less cultural, nothing more human than a country (land)’. There is a short way from this point to calling a landscape as such only if a certain degree of its alteration is accepted (obligatorily without accepting such actions as socially pardonable). It is only ‘from that moment on’ that the landscape is viewed as landscape. The judgments about certain concepts as country, or as land are left behind, so are the references to a certain typology on urban-rural field, to propensity towards details (vegetal life or fauna, the mineral dominant character of the seating), what matters most is its viewing. Quite opposed to the rigorists, through their broader acceptance of the natural still alive in a certain place, there are the specialists regarding nature and wilderness as coupled even in largely humanised city landscapes (Jorgensen and Tylecote, 2007).

In the opinion of several other experts, the physical-anthropic dualism is carefully connected with the effect of visualising the landscapes, the natural landscape systemically converting the elements of mainland as basic forms in a phenomenological display on a scale of natural essence and dominance. It is the case of mapping the natural environments on the Japanese territory at a scale 1:200.000, in which there are also included *natural landscapes* considered as natural type of resource, 15.500 items being put on the map².

On other grounds of acceptations there are opinions according to which the *natural* landscapes are in compliance with the initiatives of regeneration of urban areas (Grandin-Maurin et al., 2003). The same specialists, together with the specialists in the Council of Architecture,

² www.biodic.go.jp/english/kiso/19/19_keika_e.html

Landscapism and Environment (CAUE) in the Rhône French district speak about *natural* landscapes which, apart from the classical note of ecologically well balanced system, non-altered, include – in our opinion – elements of *pseudo-natural* appendage. Even if it is represented by planted vegetation, in reality it means anthropic intrusion in the evolution of landscape system (e. g. fir-tree plantations on the northern and western mountains, Haut and Bas Beaujolais vine estates). Then there are morphological environments situated much too close to territorial oicumenised systems which transmit suddenness and ‘tame’, humanise the landscape expected as natural in the sense of weakening it (e. g. the agricultural plain of Saône Valley, the modelled relief and the grass lands of Lyonnaise Mountains).

When the dominance of physical aspects is noticed in explaining the functioning of a limited landscape area, one can use the word *natural landscape* without the reality showing it through inventory and functioning. It is the case of hydrological studies where the field research proof and the analysis of graphics lead to conclusions about landscape dynamics. Here the appendage of natural substance is less relevant, the functioning on natural laws being paramount (Giret, 1998, p. 545).

Generally speaking, an upfront, basic and common sense approach of the issue of *naturalness* of landscape should take into account combined aspects between: the part of the world more shaped after our ideal of balance and environmental cleanliness, the incidence of visible, and with everybody’s competence according to his/her socio-cultural affinities.

Noble ‘pristineness’ of the *natural* occurring in landscape versus ‘equilibrium’ as accepted and assumed by every individual and by community. Often, the ‘pristine’ of landscape is alluded to, despite evidences (figure 2) the landscape being conceived as the landscape without animals and people, that is the landscape evolving under the auspices of its own ectogenetical code in which only the natural events can intervene.



Figure 2. An almost pristine landscape close to *natural*, despite the ‘evidence’ of the majority of opinions considering it bona fide *natural*. Scenery in the Apuseni Mountains (Romania).

Moreover, an administrative-prospective study (Limousin, 2007 - Étude prospective³) highlights through landscape not necessarily the physical, unaltered substance that is the part which should be the structural equilibrium of landscape. This study even pinpoints to the landscape in functional equilibrium, in which the beauty of the assembly and of the component

³ (1998), Conseil Régional du Limousin, Préfecture de Région, «Étude prospective Limousin 2007», Editions du Limousin, Limoges

parts is captured, in their simplicity of organising a simple form, low-keyed, known by everybody, within reach, for the people who manage landscape nature and the instruments to control it.

For manifestations of equilibrium and completeness of some phenomena in a very small space acknowledged through reference forms and being protected (e. g. the vegetal, mineral, aquatic components, anthropic or mixed reunited in distinct landscape features (of river banks) one can come to settle in shape natural micro-landscapes, only with strictly local function, which may be surrounded by landscape units with connotation other than natural (Cossin and Piégay, 2001, p. 45-55).

For the pure form of landscape naturalness, Riou (1986) offers a pictorial, edifying formulation, with strong accents linked with the place of dynamiting components and events, leaving place only for performing a scene where the actors belong to nature, other than man.

Close are other opinions and scientific popularisations (such as atlases about landscape types) which aim, through the natural effect of landscape, the desire to imprint in the collective mentality the emphasis on ecology. Therefore, the interrelationships between the natural ecosystemic elements of landscapes in diversity (through soil, water, air), highlight the landscape capacity of natural capital (MacDonald et al., 1991; Chiesura and de Groot, 2003; Crossmann and Bryan, 2009).

It is interesting as well the attempt to keep man further from the 'temptation' exerted by a certain type of landscape scenery mentally and not only mentally associated with the idea of unaltered, unspoiled, natural (for instance the uninhabited mountains, in the opinion of Gambino, 1991, p. 155), a natural which could, at a certain moment, fail to fulfil the expectations of man.

There are situations when landscapes are framed in a mosaic of 'natural regions' (Veyret, 2000; Tricart, 1994), this *natural* being too further away from *the natural* perceived as belonging to the landscape. Cocean (2002), although implies the natural of landscape in the same action of partitioning, finds conceptual resources to delineate the quotas of humanisation between different territories of landscape rank, so that the natural landscapes should be associated only to the classical isolated spaces or poorly contacted by man.

The sense of the word *natural* differs both from a place to another and according to the cultural and intellectual specificity, the agricultural landscape being dependent on the multiple facets of land usage. Therefore, by *natural* destination, some inhabitants from Madagascar rurality understand that the landscape is made up of the rice paddies on the bottom of their valleys and the land on the hillocks dependent on the pluvial regime, without including in the landscape the places for cattle breeding (Ramiarantsoa, 1996). The farmers in the Japanese rurality are more concessive in perceiving the naturalness of their rice paddies (the terraced ones and the rigorously arranged ones) as compared to the naturalists who catch more 'naturalness' in abandoned rice paddies (Natori and Chenoweth, 2008).

There is no surprise that, on the same scale, at different levels of intellectual –cultural consideration, in a sincere introspection of informing the reader, the 'natural' is placed from journalistic point of view in coordinates at hand around us, even stultified: 'The garbage scoop of the village Podari is in an enviable *natural* landscape' (quoted from the daily news journal *Evenimentul Zilei* from 6 April 2005, article signed by Băltărețu and Cojocaru). How natural can still be the landscape of a plain village situated at a couple of kilometres from Craiova municipality (a city of a couple of hundred thousand in the south of Romania)? On a somehow related orientation, the journalistic framing of another space can be included, in relation to one's desire to accept part of the guilt to use excessively the resources of the geographical space and to pollute it, conjugated with our 'expectations' regarding what it would constitute a clean environment. This time it belongs to a formerly ecologised garbage scoop, from the proximity of Oradea municipality (north-west of Romania), and the reference is at *the natural* of a landscape: 'The deposit sealed will be covered with 2 m of vegetal soil and will be grassed, therefore integrated again in the surroundings and in *the natural landscape*' (business and information magazine *Cocktail* nr. 4, March 2006, published in Oradea).

The purport of generalising the expectations we have about *the natural* of landscapes, marked by a not always appropriate ‘generosity’, may lead even to asserting as natural the landscapes (even if very cramped) in places much too used by man, as it is Borcea Pond, a holm-island oftentimes used agriculturally, located in the Romanian lower sector of Danube (Achim, 2005, p. 238).

This is the result of our liking to believe that, if there is around us a grain of something close to natural (forest, meadow, stream, river) each of them being landscapes, it is not hard for us to interpret that a spatial unity taxonomically superior inherits the features of our favourite components.

Is is pointful to consider the results of the socio-geographical questioning of some inhabitants in the Swiss rural of Neuchâtel Canton (Val-de-Ruz) in the matter of *the natural* of landscapes. Without being specialists, they sense correctly what the artificial appurtenance to their landscape means and from where it comes. It results that 22% of the total of the interviewed consider a landscape as natural, only when the aimed territory does not show construction at all (Pellegrini, 1991, pp. 231-232). The same manner of investigation is connected to other types of answers. The answers of some subjects from the East of Netherlands about the idea of preferences for landscapes are relevant. They are linked to nature as landscape depositary, the aspects of *natural-naturality* being rendered on the basis of its savageness, its force and grandeur, on the relationship of measured acceptance of man in the bosom of nature (de Groot and van den Born, 2003, p. 135). The answers of Australian and Italian subjects (students) point to their preference for *natural* landscape as overall preference, places to live and work and holiday destinations (Purcell et al., 1994). The cognition of natural landscape can be influenced also by the subjects’ idiosyncrasies and their filter of subjectivity, leading to differences of perception and analysis between photos and real-life scene, as demonstrated by a Japanese study (Ohta, 2001).

There is no separation between these approaches and the domain of protected areas, where landscapes are to be found and they have their adepts, too. In this latter case the landscapes are the object of conservation and protection, grounded in the specific regulations, including those of European Union (category 4 out of the 8 categories of protection) under the title: ‘*natural* or *semi-natural* landscapes’. By *natural* and *semi-natural* we understand here the natural vegetation or the semi-natural one from a region of landscape interest or biologic interest (they can be hunting reservations, sanctuaries, natural reservations, rush-beds, ponds, rivers, pools – Bleahu, 2004, p. 153).

THE NATURAL OF LANDSCAPES IN LINGUISTIC ACCEPTATION AND INTERPRETATION. The growing need to unify terminology in assessing landscapes proves the great impact hold by the interpretation of landscape. The word *natural* has undergone a certain desemantisation when we speak about landscape, as in the context of ‘natural landscaping’ or ‘personalised natural landscape design’ or when the beholder gives more credit to the natural at display, forgetting to interpret the anthropic elements present in a landscape. We constantly assess and judge landscapes in our mind through the language we use, without being scientifically prepared, with the lenience of everyday actions placed in a bigger context. The recourse to the word *natural* while mentioning landscape in everyday/unintentional speech mirrors the relationship between a physical reality and a perceived, intangible one. The newly emerged concept of ‘environmental identity’, apt to synthesise these positioning is a dynamic one, as stated by Clayton and Opatow (2003, p. 10).

At the level of speech, we alter *the natural* of landscape while entering a hermeneutic circle of relationships between physis, nature, the understanding of our own selves in front on the landscape and the metaphysics of questioning it. Approaching natural landscapes in terms of the meaning it has for us can broaden horizons by resorting to hermeneutical phenomenology.

Landscape as hermeneutic medium (Corner, 1991, p. 131) integrates relationships. Such relationships include localised spirituality, myth, sense of place, naming, stories, literature, songs (Stepheson, 2008, p. 134). Landscape can even allow the hermeneutic distance to be historicised (Cosgrove, 2006).

The landscape is a system of significant, because one cannot define a landscape outside its reference point, the human view. It can even be read as a text (McGreevy, 2001, p. 50).

As a system of significant (Duncan and Duncan, 2001, p. 19) landscape can be reinvented and it impacts our memory. The landscape linked with childhood memory is a constitutive part of our being, in the same way in which discourse about 'I' through narration is a means of constructing the identity of the self (Ricoeur, 1984).

While traveling is part of negotiating identity as confronted with the identity of the space (Bell and Lyall, 2001, p. 172), we deal with frontalisation as type of discourse possible for man in front of a landscape. Photography can intervene in this 'textual system' (Hill, 1996) as a means of preserving the momentary character of experiencing the landscape and of attempting to sample nature through its hybrid components, separated from their primary environment, subjected thus to a new grammar of translating nature. The non-human nature, once a starting point for mankind, tends to be more appraised in a frame of awareness exerted by the pressure of urbanization. (Head and Muir, 2007, p. 890). The discourse about nature may contain more elements, be more postmodernised but that does not change nature itself. Consequently, nature is the fix term of the mobile equation, landscape is the mobile term. Nature (coming from the Latin 'natus, nasci' – 'to be born' shares the same radix with 'nation', showing its role in constituting the national treasure and symbolism, much like in the symbolic landscapes of Yellowstone Park. There is a dichotomy in viewing nature from an utilitarian perspective, that of the anthropocentrists, nature as instrument for human ends, where the anthropic principle is intrinsic and the biocentric worldview, where human is part of the web of life (Verhagen, 2008).

Quite oppositely, landscape has entered culture and science not coming from nature, but from a representation, that of landscapes in paintings (Kwa, 2005, p. 150). There is no landscape outside its relationship with the viewer and outside the context. In figure 3 we show a hypothetical example of mental apprehension of the *natural* of landscape. The observer situated on a sea cliff may recall remote images. She/he rakes through them for the core of naturalness in spite of the obvious anthropic objects. While recollecting a cottage, a port, a natural reservation, a church, an archeological site or a road the observer filters the natural constituted by the surrounding forest, by the sea water, by a rivulet, by the landscaping design, by the aligning trees along the road (figure 3).



Figure 3. Mental exercise through which the beholder accesses features of virtual landscapes

If we deal with nature as present in the ancient times, which should be less a construct, we see the representation of the world itself in literature. While for the Greeks the horizon were one with their concept about the sea, the defining word was peras (meaning boundary, limit), which also defined their ethos and their internal rules against hybris (Liceanu, 2007, p. 15), for Romans in turn, as we can see in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the landscape is that of shadows and lights, of chiaroscuro, therefore

defining for their condition of being more sceptical, of doubt, of claiming for more in human quest and conditions. In the 19th century romanticism made room for landscape everywhere. Its presence in literature was somehow more overwhelming, more at all levels of existence than in the 20th century. The poet shaped the landscape, but with an intuition that made him visionary and prophetic. A poet like Wordsworth (Hemmings, 2007, p. 265) had knowledge of mapping himself. Nature did have an intrinsic value for the writer of the 19th century. His soul moulded after nature while in expressionists nature moulded after soul. The term *natural*, therefore, enters a hermeneutic loop: an individual understands his/her own self better in front of the 'natural', aspires to it, forgetting that he/she just makes room for the natural resorting to a mental construct. The drive within us to extrapolate the presence of natural components to the whole assembly might be a reminiscence of a mythical pattern of organising the space around us. The vertical axe is the sacred dimension of the space– axis mundi– headed for transcendence (Eliade, 1987, pp. 15-18) the horizontal direction is meant for human enterprise. A tree, a pillar, a fireplace, a hearth are symbols of centre (a junction between heaven and earth) for the archaic man, where life-marking events happen (Eliade, 1987).

Nowadays, getting in touch to the natural of a landscape accounts for getting in touch with something meaningful per se. It is like getting in touch with our own forgotten authenticity and with a glimpse of a total, cosmic reality of nature. We have a feeling that the natural, a reality of an absolute value, integrates us, and can make us more in tune with creation (see the very etymology of the word 'natural', associated with being born – *natus* in Latin). In fact, it is the other way round; we integrate the landscape through our system of relating to it, through language and interpretation or through the reflexive act of understanding ourselves by means of a reality transitive to our perception. Even for a Laos population, who use more words for the same elements of nature, they employ also the function, the utility of what they use from the biophysical sphere (Enfield, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

The diversity of geographic space, the socio-professional context encouraging a sense of transformation, the opportunities of current cultural acquisitions outline as many variants and variables through which the landscape space can be placed with easiness on a whole large scope of *naturality*. The *naturalness* of landscape places itself in a universal pattern, not critically differentiating from the word to the modelling act and vice versa (first we conceive the possibilities of employing it and then we operate, so that the result is dressed in the proper topic semantic cover). The small differences also range from rural to urban, even the rural inhabitants identify courageously with their landscape and end with the hues pinpointed by the researchers. The classic formula in representing the landscape stands valid: the components of physical origin, natural ones, give the tone to the conformation, organisation, structure, functioning and visual legitimization of natural landscapes. As for the rest, we assist to an admixture between a variable content of *natural* and a variable, too, content of artificial (although tacitly is accepted more and more) in making up the dose of naturalness of landscapes, although, correctly said, they are sub-natural. The artificialisation of the present world does not allow a decisive limit for influencing through word, coming from the specialist. The specialist cannot do otherwise but operate with methods and offer models which limit the drives towards change through word and act arising both in the individual, and in the society in general, headed for the parts of landscape that still look natural.

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