

Entropy as a New Beauty.

ABSTRACT. At the beginning of the movie American Beauty (1999), its director Sam Mendes, presents an aerial view of a typical American landscape based on sprawl and market. Lester Burnham, its main character, describes the zoom-in approximation of the aerial view of his neighborhood, to the view of his street, of his house, of his bed. Issues as market and sprawl are raised. This article makes a reflection on how the concept of beauty related to landscape has change along history trying to extract the conclusions of how this concept could mutate in the close future. The aerial views of our territories have been “democracized” as well as the possibility to enjoy landscape, capabilities previously reserved to a few ones. Along this article questions as how does one construct the idea of beauty related to landscape will be raised, studying which are the new cannons to evaluate this concept.

KEYWORDS: Landscape, democracy, view, experiment, beauty, entropy.



Mayka García Hípola

Institución: Universidad de Navarra

Dirección de trabajo y correo electrónico: c/Norias, 145, 1B, 28221 Majadahonda (Madrid)

mghipola@post.harvard.edu

Nº Teléfono 655854422

The concept of beauty related to landscape has changed along history. From the visual to the sustainable beauty, this concept has changed from the optical to the aptical, as it will be explained along this article.

1. Visual Beauty.

Petrarca was the first traveller to interpreter landscape. He wrote in the 14th century the first descriptions valuing the aesthetic and visual qualities of the territories that he had visited (***bellezza***, beauty, ***venustas***) versus its economic qualities (***ricchezza***, richness, ***utilitas***). Beauty was valued at these moment versus its utility.

The landscape that begins to be valued is the real one, and not the one that is idealized by pieces artificially extracted from other places, as it happened in some other previous projects as Villa Adriana.

Now "landscape is the result of the emotional projection on the environment, of the disinterested aesthetic trial of values that causes pleasure or rejection"¹. The artistic experience of the landscape is at this moment based on subjectivity; the man is part of the Nature that is isolated from the cosmic space and that and is called "Landscape"².

Apparently, Petrarca was the first one to experience consciously Nature as a bifocal phenomenon, as an empiric territory and, at the same time, as a place for the soul.

3. Background Beauty.

Until the 15th century Western Art was centered in the representation of figures versus Oriental cultures which had developed fantastic landscape drawings pushing forward concepts as frame or limit³. *Quattrocento* painters started then to value also background and not only figures.

4. French Intellectual Beauty.

During the Renaissance "Italian gardens" reflected the representation of paradise, an idealized world. In the 18th century Versailles introduced the "French gardens" and a new concept of beauty based in landscape events. It reflected the representation of the intellectual interests of the moment, which made landscape an observation object of massive appreciation. These projects were ordered, classical and rational. They could be considered Villa Adriana's Baroque revision and they introduced the topic of the event related with a scrupulous planning of layouts, axes and perspectives that followed a lineal narrative. Versailles' landscape was not done by composition of

pieces unaware of the place as it happened in Villa Adriana but it inherits its lineal journey of individual sequences.

5. Atmospheric Beauty.

“French gardens” were designed “in plant”, something against what the English *picturesque* landscape painters fought. After the first step done in the *Quattrocento* of valuing background, at this moment the figure itself disappears. The symbolic-religious character or the nostalgic representation of ruins of ancient times were then abandoned in favour of the representation of the force of nature, materialized in abysses or very intense atmospheric phenomena (the sublime represented by Casper David Friedrich) or of simply rustic country scenes (the picturesque represented by John Constable). This tendency valued the touching and moving atmospheric beauty of the landscape. Both tendencies share the des-anthropization of Art in favour of Landscape. At this moment, the immensity and multiplicity of the horizon was valued.

6. English Natural Beauty.

Versus their French colleagues, the English landscape designers escaped from a planar conception. Landscape also became a discipline. William Gilpin⁴ defined picturesque as that scene that pleases because it possesses some qualities that can be illustrated pictorially, discarding the factor of time and the itinerary from the landscape experience, which is reduced to a certain number of beautiful and “frozen” images. On the other hand, Uvedale Price⁵ valued time and outlined the theoretical distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful was linked with symmetry, healthiness and youth, and the sublime, according to he, was linked with eternity, absence of limits and the infinite.

At these time, the division between the world of Art and that of the Technique becomes much more evident, where an evolution took place from the old agricultural positions based in a manual intervention in the territory to the industrial gaze. Also, the technical aspect of the knowledge of the territory is improved due to the development of geographical and cartographical studies that produced many different mappings of the territory.

7. Written Material Beauty.

The writings on landscape abandoned a scientific literature in favour of a fictitious one where landscape beauty becomes the main character of the stories, extensive plagued of landscape details as it happened in Flaubert's

Madame Bovary. The literature of this time put in value the material beauty of these territories. It undraws the human characters in favour of the landscape that is the protagonist.

The whole right side of my cloth represented a rock, an enormous warty rock, covered with brown, yellow and red fucuses, on which sun slipped as oil. The light, without seeing to the hidden star behind me, fell on the stone and it gilded it with fire. It was only that. A first impressive plane of clarity, superb ignition⁶.

8. Artificially created Beauty.

By the end of 19th century Frederick Law Olmsted, wrote a text about the appreciation of landscape beauty⁷. He recommended not to make recommendations, everyone had to learn to appreciate landscape by themselves.

Central Park is one of his best examples of architectural creation of a beautiful artificial landscape, a transformed landscape although it was devised to give the impression of being varied ground in natural state.

Olmsted was an artist that worked and transformed the geologic time, playing with scale and with the multiplicity of horizons.

Whether we know it or not, whether we wish it or not, the landscape of the world, amidst which we live and move and work and play, continually affects the state of our nerves and our state of mind — in short, affects our happiness — by its beauty or its ugliness, by its infinite varieties of character.

9. Entropic Beauty.

Robert Smithson in his article titled “Frederic Law Olmsted and the dialectical landscape”⁸ presents Olmsted as the first Earthworks artist, since to build Central Park he displaced 10 million complete horse cars of earth.

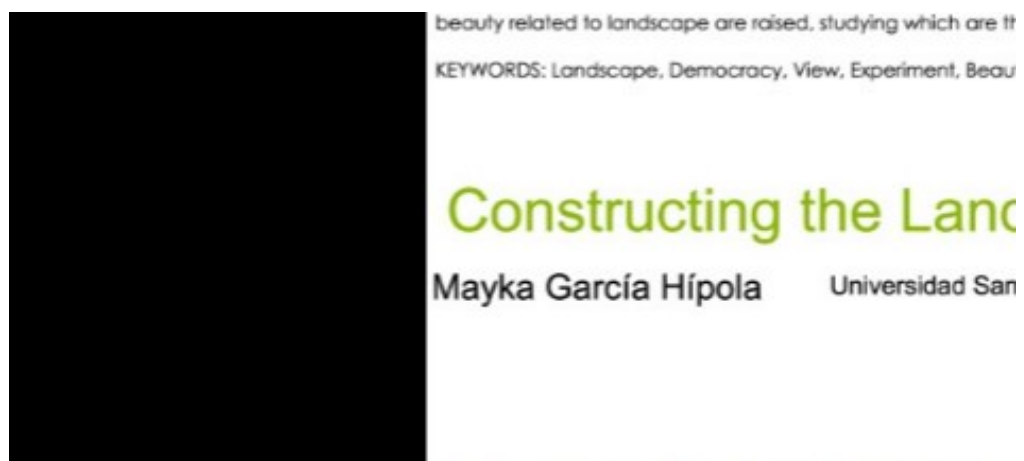
Smithson applies the concept of entropy to the territory, as the constant and irreversible degradation of energy in a place. It gives the measure of the disorder of a system. Smithson is interested in transformational processes and the forces of the natural environment. Entropy takes to a place that is in constant transformation due to human and natural forces. Smithson's idea of place is presented as a latent place, with a sleeping beauty, a beauty in suspension, expectant, full of energy and wishing to be discovered. He reflects the auditory aspects of the landscape and not only the visual ones, in his “geo-poems”.

10. Sustainable Beauty.

Nowadays some experts as Sanford Kwinter⁹ have use “thermodynamics” to describe the change from a traditional “tectonic” knowledge model of teaching and creating a new “bio-technical” model, which is able to give to the architect instruments to think his projects as living organisms, entities which have energy transfers with its surrounding. Iñaki Abalos¹⁰ has also defended the idea of beauty as something now close to sustainability

11. Conclusions for the Future

In the post-modern era there has been a transformation of the concept of beauty of the territory, registering the actions that are carried out in it.. The beauty of the territory should be conceived now as a state, as not as a result.



Entropy as a new Beauty:

- Beyond the visual, the optical.
- People being happy in places, not only for its optical qualities but also for practical and sustainable ones
- Trade-off between aesthetics and affordability.
- The image: obstacle in the current ways of operating that prevent good projects from being implemented.

-Solution: Education in the appreciation of the space.

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13. Biography.

Mayka García Hípola is Architectural Design Professor and International Relations Coordinator at Universidad San Pablo Ceu.

She got her degree in Architecture and her PhD Degree at Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM). She has been a Fulbright scholar and she got her MDesS Degree at Harvard University. She has also held a research grant at UPM where she has been teaching at Juan Navarro Baldeweg's Chair.

Nowadays she is member of the Research Group entitled *Cultural Landscape* at UPM and the research group *Architecture, Restoration and Landscape* at CEU. She has realised projects, conferences and articles dealing with the issue of Landscape that has been exhibited in the Carpenter Center at Boston in 2001 and in the Venice Architectural Biennale in 2002. Her doctoral thesis entitled "The Architectural Action over the Territory through Peter Eisenman" directed by Michael Hays and Dario Gazapo was graded as *Sobresaliente Cum Laude* by the tribunal composed by Pier Vittorio Aureli, Luis Fernandez Galiano, Juan Miguel Hernandez de Leon Rafael Moneo, and José Morales.

This research is framed in the project HAR2008-01434 financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology.

14. Notes.

¹ Maderuelo, Javier, "Paisajes descritos, un paseo por la literatura", *Actas Arte y Naturaleza*, Huesca, 1996.

² Hofmann, Werner, "Las partes y el todo", in *La abstracción del paisaje. Del romanticismo nórdico al expresionismo abstracto*, Fundación Juan March, Madrid, 2007.

³ The Chinese painter Zheng Xie says that "the painting is on the paper; but it is also outside of the paper and it prolongs and purifies it", in Cheng Francois, *Vacío y Plenitud*, Siruela, 1993.

⁴ Gilpin, William, "Essay on Picturesque Beauty", 1792

⁵ Price, Uvelade, "Essay on the Picturesque", 1794

⁶ Maupassant, Guy, "Miss Harriet", in *Mi tío Jules y otros seres marginales*, Madrid, Alianza, 1980, 1872, p.70. Quote given by Maderuelo, Javier, in "Paisajes descritos...", op. cit.. Original quote: "Todo el lado derecho de mi tela representaba una roca, una enorme roca verrugosa, cubierta con fucos pardos, amarillos y rojos, sobre los cuales el solo se deslizaba como aceite. La luz, sin que se viera al astro oculto detrás de mí, caía sobre la piedra y la doraba con fuego. Era sólo eso. Un primer plano impresionante de claridad, encendido soberbio". Translation done by the author of this article.

⁷ Olmstead, Frederik, "Appreciation of Landscape Beauty".

⁸ Smithson, Robert, "Frederic Law Olmsted y el paisaje dialéctico", *Art Forum* (February 1973) (reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt, New York University Press, 1979).

⁹ Kwinter Sandford, *Architecture of Time: Towards a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

¹⁰ Abalos, Iñáqui. "La belleza del siglo XXI", *Circo* 2005.128. "La belleza termodinámica". *Circo*, 2008.157. Edited by Luis. M. Mansilla, Luis Rojo y Emilio Muñón.