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THE LANDSCAPE SPREADS AS FAR AS YOU CAN FEEL IT AN ATMOSPHERIC LIMINOLOGY

The exemplary presence of open landscape and untamed seascape is essential to being on Earth in a human way. Without this presence, we would be confined to an inferno of artificial passages and airless corridors from which there is no escape: a disastrous environmental huis clos. We would be trapped breathlessly inside closed doors of our own devising. (Casey 2011b, 106)

1. Far from the Madding Crowd (of old and new theories)

It is by no means easy to define the landscape. For over two centuries, the humanities have failed to come up with a shared idea of this multifaceted and perennially fascinating concept. They first saw it as a (political) land-based creation, later as a visual scenery according to the detached, ocularcentric and spectatorial art of painting. Finally they came to see the landscape as a (even just metaphorical) way of performative dwelling according to non- or more-than-representational theories that oppose the increasing erosion of the meaning of places (displacement) and the resulting gaze from without by stressing the spatiality of our being-in-the-world. The contemplative and performative approaches clash with each other both academically and in everyday experience, involving both the landscape as a natural-morphological phenomenon and the landscape understood as its perception or representation (or even only a peculiar linguistic description of it)¹.

It sounds certainly exaggerated to consider the commonsensical feeling of landscapes as a commodified version of Petrarch's ascent of Mount Ventoso, where the tourist guide replaces Augustine's *Confessions* and the recommended 'panorama' replaces the cosmos

¹ See Kuhn (2011, 378).

as the object of contemplation (*theoria*). Yet, even the touristic landscape is the ability of seeing a certain place as a landscape and therefore reflects, albeit in a faded form, two much older contents, namely the man/environment (or man/nature) divide and the ability to synthesise various topological-perceptual elements into a single perspective as a *tableau*. My assumption, as will be seen later, is that the landscape is a portion of the lived space whose affective (atmospheric) 'style' we experience in a multisensory way. Therefore, some clarification is needed on some of the theories whose premises I will (at least partly) question here – especially the view whereby the landscape is a historically and culturally mediated product.

a) Some conceive of the landscape as a natural 'object' that, being irreducible to the banality of a panorama or nature reserve, which do not aim to shake the subject, still has the power to arouse the thrill of the incomprehensible. Through its immediacy and a-historicity, the landscape would withstand both the violent capitalistic unfreedom of capitalist progress and the post-idealistic monopoly of artistic beauty and the subject's identity. It sometimes manifests itself as the 'first nature' through which artworks seek consolation from the subject's oppressive identity, feeling «the urge, as if in need of a breath of fresh air, to step outside of themselves» (Adorno 2002, 63). Needless to say, this role of the landscape as an ephemeral allegory of a soteriological non-identity appears threatened if not completely eliminated by the impossibility of finding any trace of this first nature in today's globalised world.

b) Updating the pre-modern topos of the *locus amoenus* or *hortus conclusus* as an ideal (geographically impossible) place and overestimating the motto that «one only sees what one knows», perhaps ennobled in Vico-Dilthey's axiom that «only what the spirit has created, it understands», some conceive of the landscape as the sedimentation of an established creative pictorial (and/or mediatic) taste. This certainly explains the widespread trend, which finds its counterpart even in language, to see nature as a (picture of) a landscape². However, it certainly does not explain how and why European painters a few centuries ago focused on natural landscapes in their individuality rather than seeing them

² «Who saw that the shadows in the snow are blue before a painter's eye discovered it? Who saw the sparkling mother-of-pearl colors in the shimmering air of a Paris summer before the Impressionists?» (Lehmann 1986, 141).

only as the background of human actions, if they had not been influenced at least initially by a pre-existing landscape feeling. The thesis of the totally intra-artistic genesis of the modern aesthetic attention to landscape (Roger's 1997 'artialisation' for example) – which incidentally is not at all the same as a subjective 'construction' (Großheim 2014, 20-21) – thus collapses and applies at most to the European culture that followed³, while being completely alien to cultures that were much more anciently concerned with the landscape (China for example) or that, assuming it is possible to distinguish between landscape- and non-landscape-societies (Berque 1995, 11-38), have a strong sensitivity to nature. This approach, however, is more synaesthetic and felt-bodily (*leiblich*) performative than strictly visual⁴.

c) For others who are influenced more or less strictly and consciously by Idealism (especially by A.W. Schlegel and Schelling) the landscape is not only a relational notion but a mere projection of the subject, something that exists solely in the viewer's gaze⁵. Unfortunately this assumption, originally resulting from the Kantian subjectification of the beautiful and *a fortiori* of the sublime, re-emerges with a different linguistic guise in contemporary socio-constructivism, whose thesis is that the landscape is a way of seeing, composing, and constructing the world to be sought in a «creative act of our brain» (Burckhardt 2008, 33). Yet, if this were *entirely* true and any portion of space could be arbitrarily transformed into a landscape (which is not the case), the concept itself would lose its (to me) indispensable quasi-normative function.

d) There is, however, one traditional theory that, while being as flawed as the others, deserves to be taken up here at least in part. It explains the modern 'career' of landscape feeling and painting (Ritter 1974, 141-190; 2010, 129-152) as the aesthetic and theoretical (in the Greek sense of purposeless cosmic contemplation) 'compensation'⁶ for the modern society's split structure (between objectivity and subjectivity) and

³ «The appearance of landscape as landscape in the first instance, and its capacity to engage our attention is itself based in the prior engagement out of which the experience of landscape arises» (Malpas 2011, 14).

⁴ A trend pioneered by Rousseau's (1980, 105 ff.) famous seventh disinterested and multisensory walk in a plant world capable of spiritual regeneration, but considered devoid of scientific value until the recent 'performative turn'.

⁵ See Waldenfels (1985, 181) and Tilley (1994).

⁶ See Griffero (2020a).

unworldliness. This assumption of the twin birth of landscape and philosophical aesthetics certainly explains much of the Western (and perhaps not only Western)⁷ cultural history of the landscape. It especially removes any nostalgic-conservative element and, at the same time, assigns the landscape the task of expressing something totally other than socioscientific reductionism. In the past, this role was fulfilled by idyllic rural nature, but now it pertains to something quite different (e.g. urban, industrial, post-apocalyptic, dystopian landscape), and this will be the case in the future as well. This ensures a subversive detachment, whether positive or negative, from technoscientific reductionism and daily life. Importantly, it cannot be reduced to a mere commodity.

Like the other theories, this version of the thesis of the modern 'discovery' of landscape raises several problems, which I will summarise here in a nutshell. For example, instead of 'discovery' in the industrial revolution, shouldn't one speak of the 'rediscovery' of the post-medieval tendency in paintings to secularise the landscape?⁸ How to explain the undeniable existence of a deep landscape feeling in cultures that do not embrace the post-Enlightenment coexistence of scientific objectification and aesthetic presentification? Given the increasing difficulty of finding commodification-free places, does the thesis not turn into a gloomy prophecy about the imminent end of any landscape feeling whatsoever? Why was the discovery of nature as a landscape accompanied in the last two centuries by an irreversible crisis of natural beauty and the aesthetics of nature? Would the landscape feeling as a compensation not disappear if natural science moved from the Cartesian-Newtonian objectifying paradigm to others (autopoiesis for example)? Does not the very idea of an (aesthetic) compensation for naturalistic reification act as an alibi for an uncritical dialectical thought that ends up legitimising the (economical, political, etc.) *status quo*?

All these (and certainly many other) widespread brilliant interpretations do not fully explain why we prefer one portion of nature to another, considering only it a true landscape. They leave many questions unanswered, such as how natural beauty relates to artistic-cultural beauty within the landscape feeling, whether the

⁷ Indeed, it seems that landscape painting in China also developed mainly to preserve the experience of nature in a highly urbanised context (see Zehou 1994, chap. IX).

⁸ Ipsen (2006, 86).

landscape is a suprapersonal feeling inherent to the perceived or a subjective and/or collective attribution, which senses are really involved in its perception and what the relationship is between affectivity and cognition, and so on. Let's take one example of a seemingly convincing definition.

A landscape is a series of named locales, a set of relational places linked by paths, movements and narratives. It is a 'natural' topography perspectively linked to the existential Being of the body in societal space. It is a cultural code for living, an anonymous 'text' to be read and interpreted, a writing pad for inscription, a scape of and for human praxis, a mode of dwelling and a mode of experiencing. It is invested with powers, capable of being organized and choreographed in relation to sectional interests, and is always sedimented with human significances. It is story and telling, temporality and remembrance. Landscape is a signifying system through which the social is reproduced and transformed, explored and structured – process organized. Landscape, above all, represents a means of conceptual ordering that stresses relations. The concept emphasizes a conventional means of doing so, the stress is on similarity to control the undermining nature of difference, of multivocal code, found in the concepts of place or locale. A concept of place privileges difference and singularity; a concept of landscape is more holistic, acting so as to encompass rather than exclude. (Tilley 1994, 34)

Significantly, this broad pragmatic-linguistic-projectivist description overlooks the – to me, essential – relationship with atmospheric feelings and felt-bodily resonance. Even the thesis that tries to hold the «subjective, perceptual and imaginative landscape» due to «ideas, dreams, signs and symbols, cultural values, conflicting viewpoints, artistic conventions and so on», and the «objective, phenomenal and material landscape of facts and figures, slopes and rocks and motorways and other measurable processes» together (Wiley 2007, 8) advocates a mental/material dualism that sounds inadequate to my (neo)-phenomenological approach. Indeed, while my perspective does not talk about 'spirit' and 'psyche', notions resulting from a fatal millenary introjection of affective qualities with reductionist effects, it is sceptical about the existence of an autonomous natural region as, after all, this seems

to fall within the same psychologist-introjectionist-reductionist paradigmatic mistake⁹.

Today's socio-scientific anti-essentialism certainly raises many questions¹⁰ about the landscape's construction, thematisation, preservation, etc., but does not interrogate its onto-phenomenological status. Apparently justified by the huge functional spread of landscapes (which can be urban, domestic, industrial, virtual, therapeutic, etc.) and their sensory expansion (Kazig 2013 speaks of «landscape with all the senses»), the social sciences focus on the semantic-constructivist question without first specifying what their object is and what concrete sensory experiences imply. Even when trying to operationalise these (also) affective-atmospheric experiences, for instance in the form of «*in situ* analyses» (Crossey *et al.* 2022) or «*parcours commentés*» (Thibaud 2001), or when shifting from the landscape to more performative landscaping¹¹, at most they only consider the atmosphere's biological-physical effects (and not the felt-bodily ones) and, at worst, they reduce the significance of the atmospheric element to the fact that, this way, landscape representations «gain vividness» (Crossey *et al.* 2022, 564, 568-569) or free themselves from traditional landscape planning (Dettmar *et al.* 2023, 297). Arguing that the atmosphere is the essence of the landscape, and then viewing it as a projective attribution due to social conventions, doesn't provide a philosophically decisive standpoint.

2. The landscape is an atmospheric feeling

⁹ It would be «dangerous to work with the concept of nature» (Schmitz, in Meyer 2022, 29) as it entails a dualism between an unjustified materialistic naturalism and a romantic sentimentalism as the result of a back-projection of previously introjected qualities into the world. Schmitz admits a purely 'formal' concept of 'nature' (or better 'natural'), meaning anything, no matter where it is placed in the world-substance (*Weltstoff*), that has «the right to find your own form» (Schmitz, in Meyer 2022, 27), thus escaping human manipulation.

¹⁰ See for example Kühne (2013; 2019) and Kühne *et al.* (2017; 2019).

¹¹ As a being-in-the-world embodied into «everyday things like walking, looking, gardening, driving, building», as «a milieu of engagement and involvement» (Wiley 2007, 11, 149). Burckhardt (2008, 225, 282) talks about 'strollology' (promenadology) as the science that examines the sequences in which a person perceives his surrounding through walking.

Fortunately, an atmospherological theory of landscape preserves the ‘anxious tone’¹² shared by phenomenology and Romanticism in their aptitude for an epiphanic sense of nature. Only by capitalising on this tone, in fact, can one really place the lived-anisotropic space before the isotropic-cartographic one, the pathic ‘landscape’ before the gnostic ‘geography’ (according to the famous distinction made by Straus 1963, 322) and argue that the landscape, understood in at least a relatively normative sense here, not only *has* atmospheric qualities (even worse if arbitrarily projected onto it by the subject)¹³ but *is* itself an atmosphere¹⁴. Landscape is a portion of (lived) space that, thanks of its ‘physiognomy’ – i.e. the widespread feeling or atmosphere it radiates – differs from others in an aesthetically¹⁵ or better aesthesiologically ‘objective’ way. It thus suggests a qualified (more affective and felt-bodily than strictly visual) segmentation of our experiential-perceptual continuum. Importantly, assuming that it is an emotionally-charged ‘quasi-thing’¹⁶ means challenging both the subjectivist cliché that every place becomes a ‘landscape’ as long as one looks at it in an affective-projective way, and the more culturalist-anthropological one that a landscape always has a culturally constructed significance. On the contrary, the landscape *qua* atmosphere is an environmental objective-suprapersonal feeling¹⁷ that is irreducible both to

¹² What Wiley (2019, 130) explains by the fact that phenomenology is too intimate in its insistence on a neutral lived experience and at the same time too abstract to adequately consider the landscape’s historical and material specificities.

¹³ As Kühne (2013, 160) claims.

¹⁴ For Ulber (2017, 192) «landscape and atmosphere are inseparably intertwined». On the concept of atmosphere see at least Böhme (2017a; 2017b), Schmitz (2014) and Griffero (2014; 2017; 2020; 2021).

¹⁵ Aesthetic is the «character that is inherent to the place and identifies it as that particular place, and in this sense is just as ‘objective’ as the other determinations we use to identify a specific portion of territory» (D’Angelo 2001, 127).

¹⁶ Schmitz (from 1978, 116-139 on) and Griffero (2017).

¹⁷ This is a common thread running from early 20th century phenomenology to Schmitz’s New Phenomenology. Let’s see just two examples: «The landscape does not express the emotional attunement [*Stimmung*], but possesses it» (Baensch 1924, 2); its atmospheric mood, far from being a purely metaphorical-analogical transfer, «is rather a direct and originarily precise description [...]. We do not ascribe, for instance, a soul to the landscape, but we mean that man and world are jointly included in (and permeated by) a given mood. Therefore, the mood does not pertain to an isolated ‘inner life’ of man, but it is man that is inserted into the whole of the landscape». (Bollnow 1956, 39-40). See especially Großheim (1999; 2014).

psychological projections and to cultural practices. These, if anything, only come after, resulting from the individual pathic and felt-bodily 'filtering' (not constructing: Großheim 2014, 65-66) resonance¹⁸ to a previous and paradigmatically 'prototypical' atmospheric place. This is the long lasting atmosphere-type (the 'atmospheric' in Böhme's terms) on whose fundamental role of priming with respect to the subsequent performative flow¹⁹ my atmospherology has focused since the beginning.

This clarifies two things. First, that agency is reserved here first and foremost for feelings as forces occupying a space with a different degree of authority and triggering sometimes syntonetic moods (topophilia) and at other times dystonic ones (topophobia). This makes it possible to move away from the Romantic clichéd view of the landscape (deserts, mountains, sea, etc.) and the widespread identification between 'atmospheric' and 'harmonious', so as to include industrial, traffic, and urban atmospheric landscapes (which are possibly negative: anonymous, stressful, conflictual, unhealthy, etc.). Provided then that atmospheres can be positive, benign, harmonious and relaxing, but also negative, malignant, ambiguous, contradictory, indeterminate, etc., it could be said that, unlike what many think (for example Relph 1976), even the feeling of outsidership and placelessness can be suggested by a certain landscape atmosphere, even if animated by a negative tone. The much coveted place identity can also

¹⁸ This is a kind of ephemeral atmosphere-token that Böhme (for example 2017b, 140-141) calls 'atmosphere' in a strict sense and is certainly also influenced by the historicity of taste and individual and/or collective felt-bodily conditions. On the landscape or *keshiki* (the phenomenal appearance of *ki*) as a quasi-objective example of the Japanese «culture of becoming, not of being: to live was to float on the waves of becoming at their mercy», see Sasaki (2006, 91). It is worth noting that Western dualism can also be found in the Japanese differentiation between *keshiki* (meaning an optically perceived distant phenomenal form) and *hekai* (multisensory but especially haptic and acoustic felt-bodily experience as a presentiment of something unknown). Hisayama's (2014, 99-109) suggestion is to think of *keshiki* as referring to «panspheric experiences where the self and their *Umgebung* merge together» (Hisayama 2014, 108), and of *hekai* as a specific quasi-thingly phenomenon whose configurative process is still ongoing and whose appearance triggers a pre-reflective narrowing effect (Hisayama 2011, 22-26).

¹⁹ «Landscape is constituted in a performative flow of aesthetic perception, and is thus at the same time culturally and historically disposed in its constitutedness [...]. The aesthetic constitution of landscape stands in an interactive relationship to the systemic construction of its lived experience» (Hasse 2014, 344).

actually derive from stereotyped (parochial, narrow-minded, xenophobic) conventions and kitsch feelings (maybe too precisely planned)²⁰, which are not, however, less atmospheric than others because of this ‘negativity’. Rather, the question is whether and how a fully dystonic-inhospitable landscape can provide the ontological security (immunity) clearly manifested in the human need for any landscape that is experienced as a dwelling and a home.

Secondly, the atmospherological theory of landscape distances itself from other popular explanations. For example, it departs from the phylogenetic theory, which assumes (savannah- and prospect-refuge theory) that some landscapes are preferred insofar as they stimulate and facilitate the acquisition of information for us today, just as they did for people living in prehistoric times. It also departs from sociogenetic theories, according to which we prefer the landscape in which we have incorporated our habits and symbolic attributions. Without completely excluding that landscape is predominantly a niche whose affordances ensure a protective function, I rather embrace some insights from Gestalt-based ontogenetic theories for which the most affectively engaging place, thus deserving to be called landscape, is the one in which the isomorphism between atmospheric *qualia* and the felt-bodily dispositions (individual and/or collective) is best realised.

Crucially, what gives the portion of space we call landscape a certain ‘physiognomy’ is its atmosphere. This notion must be removed from the long shadow of physicotheology and physiognomic hermeneutics, obsessed with the need to trace any expression back to some form of interiority. Here physiognomy has only to do with appearance, that is, with the impression potential exerted on us by the atmospheric irradiation of the perceived ‘character’ in a given form (Böhme 2002, 113-167). This meaning goes back to Alexander von Humboldt’s ‘general impression’ (*Totaleindruck*) (Humboldt 2010, 342) of the place experienced, whose mood (*Stimmung*) might be represented in painting. More

²⁰ «The paradox of modern landscapes is that they are dehumanising because they are excessively humanised. There is almost nothing in them that has not been conceived and planned so that it will serve those human needs which can be assessed in terms of efficiency or improved material conditions. But there is almost nothing in them that can happen spontaneously, autonomously or accidentally, or which expresses human emotions and feelings» (Relph 1981, 104). Still, a planned landscape does trigger a human feeling, even if we don’t like it or find it too manipulative to consider it a real atmosphere.

recently, the physiognomic approach has been the focus of Lehmann's more systematic attempt to scientifically hold together geographical, aesthetic, psychic and intellectual-historical aspects in the belief, however, that only an aesthetic perspective really fulfils the physiognomic perception. Nevertheless, it is controversial which extra-rational term is the most appropriate here, whether 'intuition' (*Anschauung*) or 'perception' (*Wahrnehmung*), immediate 'sensation' (*Empfindung*) or even 'vision' (*Schauung*)²¹. Taking into account the landscape's variability due to climatic and psychological conditions, Lehmann identifies some methodological points of view: a) the landscape's morphologic language (or style), b) its mood content-inducing colour and light value, and c) its significance. The latter is cultural but not arbitrarily projective: it's not as if one perceives only what one already knows (Lehmann 1986, 145-147).

When partially retranslated, these criteria also apply to my own atmospherological perspective²². They are what I call 'ecological' affordances, 'invitations' that, however, 'supervene' on the strictly physical features and are not limited to pragmatic indications, but can invite us to 'simply' contemplate something and pathically indulge in what we are contemplating, *contra* the many who for fear of hypostatisation end up over-identifying the atmosphere with its ongoing effect²³. These spatially widespread aesthetical-affective (non Gibsonian) affordances (Griffero 2023; Arbib-Griffero 2023) are the same which Böhme (2017, 37-54) calls 'ecstasies' of things, clearly distinguishing them from 'properties' due to their general tendency to 'show up'. They act as affective-qualitative niches that, especially when suggesting a landscape, allow-invite us to linger contemplatively in it and even, when we feel like we are resisting a projective-reflective process (what I called a 'prototypical' atmosphere), to change our previous emotional state.

²¹ With *Schauung* Klages (1929-32) means a pathic-aesthetic but also virtually kinetic surrender of the viewer, due to the reunification of image and soul, to an 'inner' and constantly changing 'image' of the landscape. See Hahn (2012, 50-56).

²² He explains the landscape's characters (Lehmann 1986, especially 150, fn. 32) by talking of conical, cubic, concave, convex shapes, of the tendency to see from left to right in accordance with our writing, etc.

²³ Ulber (2018, 195 ff.), however, maybe distinguishes too sharply between atmospheres that are engaging and whose affordances prompt action (urban and anthropogenic atmospheres) and atmospheres that are distant and restrained (natural atmospheres).

Nevertheless, I argue that the pervasive sentimental tonality I call atmosphere becomes a full-fledged landscape feeling, which is consciously experienced in its constitutive extraneousness to the objective-quantitative dimension privileged by modernity, only when it meets certain requirements.

3. For a landscape to really be a landscape

I will now analyse these four requirements, delving especially into the last one.

3.1. Separation and distance

For landscape to be in contemplative-affective opposition to objectivist reductionism, there must necessarily be a (implicitly aesthetic) separation or detachment. Everything that is perceived and appreciated in its form needs a 'right distance' from which to observe it. Notoriously, this bodily but especially felt-bodily distance is the character most criticised as anachronistic by any ideological approach to landscape. This perspective has succeeded in stripping the very concept of landscape of any innocence and usually considers it the result of the «elitist, proprietorial and imperialist lineaments of Western [...] discourse» (Wiley 2007, 157)²⁴, of «the violence and evil written on the land, projected there by the gazing eye», and as «the medium by which this evil is veiled and naturalized» (Mitchell 2002, 29-30). Instead of dealing with this «'dark side' of landscape – its complicity in exclusion and oppression» (Malpas 2011, 6) – however, I'll focus phenomenologically on its 'before', that is, on the pathic-atmospheric feeling aroused by a portion of nature from a certain detached point of 'view' (in the broad sense). This necessarily precedes the ideological use that sometimes was and is made of it (and which can also be politically benign, as shown by the idea of attachment to a place). After all, only if one feels this previous pathic effect can one possibly «understand the power that can be exerted through it». (Malpas 2011, 24, fn. 15).

In addition, it would be absurd to call landscape (and not simply place) an «up-close, intimate and proximate material milieu of engagement and practice» (Wiley 2007, 167) or a closed-eye experience. These experiences can certainly engender deep

²⁴ Which would be «based on the exploitation of the non-property classes or on the dispossession and oppression of indigenous populations» (Malpas 2011, 8).

attachment to a place²⁵ but not a landscape feeling in the proper sense. Landscape, in fact, is much more than a visual scene and implies a perceptual-kinetic process that is synaesthetically inclined; without an optical core, a visual aspect at a certain scale and distance, there may be a lived experience of nature but not a 'landscape' (Lehmann 1986, 140). The same goes for the zoomed-in perception of the viewer looking through a telescope or a microscope, i.e. at excessive distance or proximity, or for all that is devoid of spatial wideness and depth. Landscape always implies a mesoscopic dimension that only a certain distance can provide; it cannot be off to one side, too partial and perspectively lateral in relation to the superordinate whole (it's hard to describe a room or a car, a street corner or a staircase, as landscape). Of course, a landscape must also be perceived from a 'distance' in the sense both of being able to do so safely (as is well known since the Kantian sublime) and of freeing oneself at least temporarily from urban and civilised life (which is presupposed for such a detachment to be perceived). In short: without this sense of distance and difference «we would be engulfed by our environment – drowned in an ever-shifting and thickening viscosity of sensations» (Grange 1985, 73). In other words, we would be deprived of that 'eros' that Klages (2018) – clearly influencing Benjamin's discourse on *aura* – ascribes to the *Urbild* as something spatio-temporally distant but above all rationally-conceptually elusive. This *Urbild*, which is concealed everywhere else, therefore manifests itself in the landscape as something non-sensible. Only this separation and perceptual centrality enables the partial ecstatic feeling that belongs essentially to the landscape and cannot be replaced by today's overrated performative equivalent (the so-called 'landscaping').

3.2. Unity and supervenience

The second requisite is that landscape has to be a place structured in such a way as to enable many different elements to gather together into a unitary value-laden Gestalt. It can result from transient components (climatic-seasonal effects, time of day, brightness and sound, odours, presence or absence of wind, etc.) and more stable ones (watercourses, mountains, trees, horizon outline from a stable point of view, etc.); on closer inspection, these two basic elements are the same that are masterfully held together

²⁵ For an overview see Seamon (2018; 2023).

as a depiction of the mountain-water ensemble by the highly symbolic (iconic-analogical) Chinese landscape painting (Fischer 1922, especially 158-167). It is this unity that suggests the inclusion of a certain place in a given type of landscape. It serves as a basic melody that, while most prominently expressed under particular climatic conditions and at specific peaks (Kozljanič 2010, 160) – in the worst case in a deterministic way, leading to racist prejudices²⁶ – does not capriciously change entirely due to changing weather conditions.

As a Gestalt-quality, moreover, the landscape emerges from and supervenes on (also material) components insofar as it is not exhaustively traceable to them. Famously, for Georg Simmel the relative objectivity of the landscape depends on its being a 'spiritual form' (mood, *Stimmung*) that is neither only objective nor only subjective, but rather artistic *in statu nascendi*. This spirituality gives the landscape its unity, in such a way that the latter can be distinguished from the 'mood' of the landscape only *ex post*, namely when the psychic act is broken down. Furthermore, the fact that this spatially delimited unity should at least allude to the unity of nature beyond the framework of the landscape itself – even if only by means of a single branch in empty space, as in Far Eastern landscape painting (Lehmann 1986, 138) – inscribes Simmel's theory in the revelationist view of the landscape, which is based on hiding certain aspects (it «hides things, removes them, obscures them from view»; Malpas 2011, 22) while revealing others (it «draws things together, connects them, allows them to appear»; Malpas 2011, 22).

3.3 Felt-bodily attachment to landscape

The third fundamental requirement is that the landscape perception finds its accurate resonance in the perceiver's felt body. Some have claimed that «landscape and the body are the effective epicenters of the geographical self» (Casey 2011a, 419). Others, following Merleau-Ponty, have argued that «the visible landscape

²⁶ See for example the 25 landscape styles examined by Banse (whereby the ideal creative climate would *of course* be German!) (Banse 1928, 170). Falter (2006, 338-363) provides an overview of scholars who focused on the connection between landscape and race and who oscillated between a conservative position and a more National Socialist-oriented activism (especially Clauss 1923, 1926). Watsuji (1961) and, more recently, Norberg-Schulz (1980), have proposed typologies that are less prejudiced or, at least, less compromised with conservative determinism.

is [...] an ongoing process of intertwining» such that «when I look, I *see with* landscape. I am neither looking *at* it, nor straightforwardly placed 'inside' it. I am intertwined instead within an unfolding differentiation. To put this perceptually, I perceive through an attunement with landscape» (Wiley 2007, 152). Unfortunately, neither position is enough from a neo-phenomenological point of view. Insisting on the embodied experience of landscape – also in the pioneering manner attempted a century ago by Hellpach (1977, 168-199) when speaking of 'atmospheric tone', 'color induction', 'sensutonic effects' and 'irradiation' (but still mainly in the projective sense of 'animating the landscape') – only acquires a real phenomenological (and not just metaphorical) meaning in relation to a detailed theory of the felt body (*Leib*), explaining the experience of landscape as a specific felt-bodily communication.

The felt-bodily approach rejects the pragmatist assumption that the landscape is nothing but a taskscape, the milieu of everyday practical engagement and/or the blank page on which one can write anything at all. It also refuses to reduce the landscape experience to a reflection of people's changing reactions to places²⁷, no matter through which vehicle²⁸. Rather, it investigates, for example, if and why chronologically and synchronically different types of landscape result from some prevailing felt-bodily islands. More generally, without going into the details of Schmitz's 13 component 'felt body alphabet', it considers whether landscapes arise from the continuous oscillation and mediation between tension and relaxation as non-radically exclusive manifestations of two extreme poles such as narrowness and vastness. Accordingly, in this view the landscape is essentially an *ad-hoc* superordinate felt body resulting from a particular type both of felt-bodily resonance (characterised by the intertwining of vastness, narrowness, rhythmic oscillation between contraction and expansion, epicritic pointing or protopathic diffusion, etc.) and of felt-bodily communication, based on kinetic suggestions and synesthetic characters – perhaps, in the case of landscape,

²⁷ As asserted by Ulber (2017, 13) even partially contradicting her insistence on anti-introjectionism (Ulber 2017, 209) whereby she says that «atmospheres can exist independently from humans» (Ulber 2017, 215).

²⁸ For some reflections on atmospheric phenomenography (also applicable to landscape) see De Matteis *et al.* (2019), Rauh (2018: 'aesthetic' fieldwork and atmospheric portfolio), Hasse (2020: photography) and Ulber (2017, 81-159: artistic translation).

especially on the antagonistic encorporation and excorporation²⁹. Thus understood, the feeling of landscape clearly reveals aesthetically and pre-reflectively the nature that we ourselves are, by manifesting how we 'feel' in a certain situation and describing our pathic participation in a place. Being an unpredictable 'in-betweenness' prior to the subjective and objective pole³⁰, the landscape can surprise us far more than human works can.

3.4. Liminology

The landscape feeling falls within the human need to make a selection within the perceptual field and establish boundaries among things and events, no matter if they are fuzzy, forcibly imposed by the figure-ground organisation or the geopolitical domain, oppressive-restrictive or comforting-orienting, etc. For this reason, atmospherology regards no landscape as without margins or boundaries, which are affective and felt-bodily in nature. This makes it reasonable to wonder (so to speak) where a landscape begins and ends (at what point can one say that they are in the landscape of the Bay of Naples, for example, and not simply in the Naples area?), and to suggest a classification of landscapes using parameters that are not quantitative-predictive but equally objective, at least according to anthropical and mesoscopic granularity. Obviously, the answer to this liminological problem – are those boundaries a mere *façon de parler*, the product of our active worldmaking or, despite their unavoidable vagueness, are they ontologically independent from our engagement? – is decisive for a phenomenology of landscape and *a fortiori* for an ontology of landscape, pushing it to investigate the natural or cultural character (both understood in the broad sense)³¹ of what interrupts a phenomenal *continuum*.

²⁹ For a more in-depth analysis of the neo-phenomenological felt body alphabet, only sketched in relation to landscape by Ulber (2017, 35-40), cf. Griffero (2024, 111-144).

³⁰ Chinese landscape painting, already a millennium before European painting, showed that the landscape is not an object (panorama) in front of the subject-observer, but a infinite unfolding in-between the elements or correlants (here mountain-water), i.e. between high, stable forms and the low, flowing and formless. See Jullien (2020, 120-122).

³¹ According to the distinction between objective, objectified and subjective spirit (e.g. Hartmann), the cultural-objective landscape could be distinguished from cultural-objectified landscape and *a fortiori* from cultural-subjective landscape (Kozljanič 2010, 168-176).

In this, New Phenomenology can help only to a limited extent. At first glance, Schmitz's interpretation of landscape is rather traditional. The landscape's emergence (in the West) in the modern age is actually traced back to two attitudes, namely the Baroque and Chinese, based mainly on an aerial perspective, and the Mannerist-Romantic that instead favours shimmer and glow (Schmitz 1969, 397-401). More fundamentally, however, the emergence of landscape should be ascribed to the real 'revolution' (Schmitz 2014, 125) accomplished by the modern 'school of vision'. The latter, deeply influenced by the transition from the material enclosure typical of Baroque garden art to the visual one typical of the boundless English garden influenced by landscape painting, increasingly feels the need (as shown by using the so-called 'Claude glass') for an 'invisible enclosure' (Schmitz 1977, 287-308). Through a revision of the concept of perception, understood no longer as the transmission and (even neural) reprocessing of data but as felt-bodily communication, Schmitz (lastly 2014, 109-133) conceives of landscape as a specific form of perception that 'almost always' tends toward excorporation-immersion in the vastness (even through impressions coming from pure qualities that completely disassociate themselves from their vehicle). This vastness, thanks to a 'framing vision' now realised without the need for artifice, does not go so far as to become *unio mystica*. The immersive excorporation into the landscape is an example among others of an (atmospheric) unsplittable relationship that can never be converted into connections or, at most, can be transformed into them only later. But, above all, the landscape feeling is considered as belonging to a broader class, that of dwelling as «culture-cultivation of feelings in an enclosed space» (Schmitz 1977, 258 ff.). This means that atmospheres (also of landscape) can at least in part be generated and cultivated. However, they cannot be projectively manipulated: it «will be better to be guided, at least to a considerable extent, by involuntary inspirations, which will depend on how [one] feels, i.e. on the atmospheres that have already seized [one] and [one's] reaction to them» (Schmitz 1977, 302).

Neo-phenomenologically speaking, landscape boundaries are necessary and only partly due to the beholder's eye. But what boundaries are we talking about, then? Certainly not about the solid ones set by common sense, naive geography (hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, etc.) and even history, whose determinacy is only apparent (where does a mountain begin and end? When does the

French Revolution begin and end?). Rather, landscape boundaries are about a vague qualitative heterogeneity, reminiscent of clouds and shadows insofar as it made up of parts that are objectively not there. As (also) based on Gestalt factors (proximity, continuity, closure, colour and texture similarity, good form, etc.), landscape boundaries afford a certain perception and form an external (immaterial) point of aggregation, granting it a persisting identity that results neither from the hand of nature (or God) nor from people's arbitrary-projective choices³².

Let me be clear: in claiming that a landscape can only be such if it is framed by boundaries, atmospherology simply goes one step further in the same direction taken, in a less affective and by no means felt-bodily way, by champions of non-representational geography such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Casey. Tuan sees in spatial framelessness a bewildering and threatening obstacle to any location of human-social constructions. Casey, for his part, was influenced by Heidegger's idea that a boundary is not that at which something stops but – as the Greeks recognized – «that from which something begins its presencing» (Heidegger 1971, 154). At the same time, he is also very critical of Merleau-Ponty's «continuism-cum-wholism» (Casey 2007, 68) as the basis of an all-encompassing fleshly monism devoid of discontinuities that, alone, enable the lifeworldly phenomenal and existential relationship between the felt body and the world's physical (but also felt) body (Griffero 2024). Casey offers an important classification (rims or edges, gaps, borders and boundaries), which I would like to explore a bit in what follows.

My take on the landscape's atmospheric boundaries is that they aren't 'rims' insofar as the latter are fully determinate, detachable, humanly constructed and institutionally sanctioned (legally, cartographically, etc.) entities. They are also not formal 'borders' insofar as these characterise a place horizontally and result from some kind of intervention. Although partially intertwined with 'gaps' like moats and valleys, unlike these, they are not materially discontinuous with what they separate. Rather, they are 'boundaries' because, despite their material vagueness and intrinsic porosity with respect to the spatial continuum, they are precisely felt as a termination. Without being too sharply defined

³² «As a deeply immanent dimension of human and animal experience, landscape cannot be built, much less manufactured: it can only be experienced, undergone — or ruined» (Casey 2017, 180).

or indiscernible, which would respectively make us feel emotionally constricted or lost in an empty space, they maintain contact between the separated parts without imposing the physical barriers that things typically impose on anyone trying to move between them. To put it Gestaltically, the atmospheric landscape is a 'figure' that does not obstruct the perception of the topologically open wider place (background): it is a kind of (affective) ha-ha boundary that always hints at its extension beyond the focused 'frame' (as in the case of the seascape, which obviously continues beyond the edges of my window). The atmospheric landscape can also have internal boundaries, namely a set of edges forming an inner shape – a path cutting through a mountain, for instance. However, only the external boundaries, enabling a distanced, unitary, holistic affect- and felt body-laden perception, deserve to be considered as the landscape's boundaries. Paraphrasing the ecological notion of 'ecotone' – meaning the emergent effect of the meeting of two different areas that supervenes on the mere summation of their forces and works as a kind of 'augmentation of becoming' and 'interpotentiation' of energies (Casey 2011b, 100 ff.) – one could also consider the atmospheric landscape as the effect of an 'atmotone'. It results from the affording power of the perceptual field's margins, no matter whether they are thetically or only peripherically-distractedly perceived, and of the atmospheric affective energies they accumulate and concentrate far before any pragmatic engagement.

Today, urban and media environments seem to satisfy every need for resonance. But they do so through planned techniques resulting in surveillance and emotional control³³. On the contrary, the non-urban landscape still affords a pathic-involuntary resonance that is impossible elsewhere, without either being intersubjectively incommunicable and completely betrayed by its semi-reflective translation, or necessarily leading to a fundamentalistic naturalism. Clichés such as the following: «the landscape is within us before it is around us. We realize in the world in which we live the landscape we have in our minds» (Morelli 2011, 15) should be opposed by an atmospheric and anti-projectivist interpretation that is able to attribute a renewed and less culturalistic-constructionist sense to the famous 'landscape eye' (Riehl 1862). And this despite the vagueness that unavoidably

³³ But not necessarily in an increased cognitive involvement, as Ulber (2017, 186-187) instead states.

undermines notions like 'landscape' and 'boundaries', not to mention that of 'vagueness' itself.

Leaving this vagueness-conundrum³⁴ to ontology and only looking at everyday phenomenal experience, it makes sense to assume that landscapes best embody and exemplify the power of atmospheres as entities that are actually present in our renewed and less thingly ontological catalogue. Feeling-sensing the landscape, far from being an act of human hybris, is rather a pathic *ekphrasis* of nature that, however, is guided (so to speak) by nature's boundaries and real texture. Hence new paths and agendas. First it can be established that the landscape atmosphere, being quasi-thingly, exists where (and as far as) it is really affectively involving. These affective boundaries may in part be *de dicto* boundaries (the sedimented outcome of *fiat* boundaries due to conventional decisions and stipulations), but for the most part they are instead *de re* (*bona fide*) boundaries. They are due to sets of affordances that, though devoid of the (ultimately material) identity the reductionist mind requires, use their affective-grasping power to segment our lived space in a way we can modify-amend 'projectively' only occasionally. The segmentation of the spatial continuum the landscape makes possible *almost* corresponds to what Plato advocates as «division into species according to the *natural formation*, where the joint is, not breaking any part as a bad carver might» (*Phaedrus* 265d; emphasis mine).

To sum up: for the neo-phenomenological and atmospherological approach, landscape is a lived space permeated by a quasi-objective atmospheric feeling. It resonates in the perceiver in a felt-bodily way, providing for a distanced and unitary contemplative (not only visual) form whose margins are (especially) *de re* boundaries. These, in turn, are due to the quasi-thingly segmentation that the type-atmospheres, as such relatively independent of the relationship with the percipient, constantly perform. The analytical work about the landscape as an 'atmotone', however, is only just beginning. What's certain is that talking about landscape is by no means only a linguistic (rhetorical) device, but an essential (aesthetical-affective) component of the atmospheric niche that defines not so much *where*, but *how* we live pathically.

³⁴ See for example Mark-Smith (2003).

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