LANDSCAPE AND PROJECT IN THE CONTEMPORARY URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction

The present essay reflects on landscape teaching and research at Faculties of Architecture and Urbanism, especially when it comes to teaching landscape design. What are we dealing with when we refer to the landscape in the project activity? This questioning is crucial for students and teachers, involved for several hours a week in a design studio in the elaboration of landscape design proposals that are mostly directed towards urban spaces. It is crucial in the literal sense of putting us at a crossroads from which it is possible to define and, perhaps, legitimize both the object of teaching and research in landscaping, as well as addressing the following questions: can landscape experience occur in the contemporary urban environment? If so, can landscape projects evoke and provoke such an experience? And how? In order to deal with the above questions, it is

important to highlight the main obstacles that, in my opinion, contribute to neglection of the landscape experience in the teaching of landscaping. Are they: 1. abuse of the terms “landscape” and “landscaping”; 2. An avalanche of so-called "objective data” (including "good practices" and "good design").

Landscape and landscaping

If there is a certain consensus in stating that landscaping refers to the landscape, the same is not true in the case of saying what is meant by landscape and landscape experience. The difficulty is probably due to the different meanings of this word, depending on the area of knowledge or performance that uses it. In the field of Architecture and Urbanism, the sense of landscape moved, very quickly from the garden around the buildings to the one, more usual in geography, of a terrestrial environment, that is, everything "that is around man" (Dardel, 1990, 41). The attempt made by Rosario Assunto to define the landscape, distinguishing it conceptually from the notions of territory and environment, as “the 'form' in which the *a priori* synthetic unit of 'matter' (territory) and 'content-or-function' (environment) is expressed” (Assunto, apud Serrão, 2011, 128) does not solve the problem that lies in the excessive generality of the empirical field that the teaching of landscaping seeks to encompass. Such generality allows for the application of the term landscape to any and all sets of objects and on any scale, although the author, in a previous work, had carefully delimited its scope (Assunto 1975). Even recognizing the importance of contributions such as those by John Brinckerhoff Jackson, his understanding of landscape as “a synthetic space, a system of spaces created by man over the surface of the earth (1984, 8), ends up giving landscape an amplitude in which its own disciplinary limits are lost. Let’s make this very clear: it is

not a matter of drawing limits in order to define professional skills. However, in the case of teaching landscaping in schools of Architecture and Urbanism, if the landscape is not themed in its specificities, if the object of study or intervention that is called landscape can be confused with a system of man-made spaces disposed on the surface of the earth or even with the environment (which, correctly, by the way, implies the association of nature and culture), what would be the difference between a discipline of urban-regional planning or even a discipline of urban design and one of landscaping or landscape architecture? Searching for landscape definitions is as attractive as it is uncomfortable and even frustrating. Almost invariably one falls into a somewhat innocuous relativism that, in practice, is equivalent to allowing each one to use the term as he sees fit. One of the most successful approaches, not in the search for a definition, but for compatibility between different views, is perhaps that of the essay by Jean-Marc Besse, entitled "Les cinq portes du paysage" (Besse, 2009). At first glance, Besse seems to adopt a compromise solution between subjectivists and realists, between culturalist and phenomenological approaches, which would lead him to point out the convenience, or the need, to go through all the "doors". However, it is at the conclusion of his essay that Besse launches, in an innovative and thought-provoking way, a fundamental recommendation for anyone who ventures to reflect on the landscape or make interventions in it: give up the totalizing syntheses and accept the inconclusion. This is also true, obviously, for one of the "doors" considered by Besse – the last one, by the way – and which interests us in a special way: the landscape as a project.

In this essay, Besse more precisely circumscribes the scope of the landscape designer's activity and, therefore, the character of the landscape project, by assigning the landscape designer the role of the bearer (*porteur*), the herald, and the messenger of the site. But the landscape designer being

the bearer, the herald, the messenger of the site does not guarantee that the experience of the landscape is properly considered and that the landscape project will transmit it.

Taking the site into account would not, in itself, prevent the landscape designer from limiting himself to partial analyses, even if exhaustive, without reaching the landscape itself. Several layers of data – from geomorphology, soil, relief, hydrography, climate, flora and fauna to habits and expectations of residents, history and the culture of a place – do not in themselves lead to the experience of landscape. It is necessary to meet the condition that the data analysis is "inventive", as proposed by Bernard Lassus. Commenting on the work process of this landscape designer, Massimo Venturi Ferriolo emphasizes the fundamental importance that Lassus attaches to inventive analysis: it is "the starting point of the procedures. It presupposes a landscape designer to be well informed by a pluridisciplinary physical and demo-ethno-anthropological investigation, with the participation of several specialists to provide reliable data for a territory (Ferriolo, 2006, 21).

The fact that this collection of information requires the "fluctuating attention" of the landscape designer, that is, that he/she takes into account the oscillations of the places, and that he/she makes him/herself "sponge [...] from the ground to the sky, several times, until exhaustion (Idem), that is, that he/she gets drenched in *places*, does not guarantee access to the experience of the landscape; it still continues to be about *places* and not exactly about landscape. It can even be said that the risk lies, precisely, in the "landscape designer being well informed by a pluridisciplinary physical and demo-ethno-anthropological investigation, with the participation of several specialists to provide reliable data of a territory". The risk is not in the information in itself; it is undoubtedly necessary and fundamental. The risk lies in the fact that extremely easy access to information makes us

believe that we are accessing the landscape, when, on the contrary, it is still very far away. More than being a bearer (*porteur*) of the site, something that is too linked to destinations, intentions, programmes and anthropocentric demands, it would be better for the landscape designer to be a bearer of the inhuman.

The inhuman

Lyotard's approach in *L'inhumain. Causeries sur le temps* (2018), is opportune for what we want to deal with here, not because of its applicability, of course, which, by the way, would be not only impossible but also inappropriate, but for waking us up from the anaesthesia of "good practices" or "good design". Everything, or almost everything, is available these days. Everything becomes immediately accessible information, whether isolated or already synthesized, ready for consumption. Not even the information collected in the so-called "participatory processes", which values the speech of the people or communities involved, can escape this condition. It may be nothing more than mere reflections of prevailing widespread orders, bundled under the label of humanism. Although written in another context, it seems appropriate to quote the words of Gaëlle Bernard in the preface she wrote for *L'inhumain*, to say that landscape design is at risk of "anticipating what will happen and preventing everything that may properly 'happen' (...). The future is thus subjected to the present; nothing should happen without being anticipated or foreseen" (Bernard, 2018, 8). The inhuman, however, is what *escapes*. There are two types of inhuman, according to Lyotard. One corresponds to the inhumanity of the system in the process of consolidation, under the name of development" (Lyotard, 2018, 14). The inhuman of development does not care about man; instead of emancipating him, it is he who emancipates himself from man

(Bernard, 2018, 7). The other is the inhuman of wild "childhood" that received, felt, suffered the touch of things "before" speaking, (from which) we are never free, no matter how much we intend to be autonomous when admitting to ourselves that we are adults (Idem, 9).

And this inhuman is not something foreign to art: "If art resists postmodern inhumanity, it is because it is also inhuman: it testifies an inhuman reality, a reality that surpasses human capacities of apprehension, and can only do so because the artist makes his/her human self bow to the inhumane that heshe has in him/her – Thing, childhood." (Idem, 11).

What can be done to face the inhuman of development if not to resist it? Lyotard asks. And what remains to resist, he continues, "If not the debt that the **soul** [emphasis added] has assumed with the miserable and admirable indeterminacy from which it was born and does not stop being born? That is, with the other inhuman? (Lyotard, 2018, 18).

Lyotard's text entitled "Scapeland", published for the first time in 1988, and which integrates the essays gathered in the book *L'Inhumain,* leads in a very propitious way to what we seek to deal with here. The title "Scapeland" already anticipates how Lyotard considers the landscape: the inversion of terms (scapeland - landscape) allows for the interpretation of the landscape as an escape, an opening through which it is possible to get rid of the grids of common reason that, today, are confused with the reason of the inhuman development. It is not the case, on this occasion, to spend a lot of time analysing the text, but a few words that Lyotard spelled out in capital letters may give an idea of what is at stake in the inhuman landscape. Here are some of them:

STRANGENESS (*dépaysement*): strangeness would be a condition of the landscape (Lyotard, 2018, 173).

UNABITABLE: "A palace in which all rooms are known does not deserve to be inhabited" (quoting Lampedusa) (Idem).

INDESTINATED: (landscape) is the opposite of a place (*lieu*), if a place is associated with the destination (...). Sweet violence that the indeterminacy exerts on the determined so that it leaves its QUOD[1] (Idem).

CLANDESTINES: (landscapes) reveal themselves in a flash, like CLANDESTINES. Strictly speaking, we never see them again. (...) It is always the unknown room of the palace (Idem, 175).

MATTER: landscape is a matter of matter. Matter is what (...) is not intended. Forms domesticate (the matter), make it consumable. (...) In a beautiful visual landscape, (...) the aimless walk, the walk, the will of wandering, they only transfer material powers to smells, to the tactile quality of the soil, walls, vegetables (Idem, 176).

FORIS: Landscapes are those confines where the materials are offered raw, before being prepared (...) they were said to be wild because it was always (...) about forests. "FORIS", outside. Outside the fence, the cultivated, of the shaped (Idem).

DESOLATION: landscape desolates our spirit. Instead of blood, it makes a lymph flow, which is the soul (Idem).

EXCESS: (in a place), minerals, vegetables, animals are aligned to knowledge and this is dedicated to those, spontaneously. They are made and selected for each other (...). But it (landscape) always requires an EXCESS (even the excessively little) (...) landscape is too much presence. My know-how is not enough. It is a glimpse of the inhuman (...) (Idem, 177).

DESCRIPTURE (*Décriture*): It would be necessary to describe, to be able to describe. To search for the rhythm of the sentences, to choose

1 In Latin, "quid" is an interrogative pronoun, it asks about something that is not yet known, while "quod" is a relative pronoun that refers, therefore, to something that has already been stated in the sentence.

the words according to their singular deviation from the phonetic, lexical norm, to rework conventional syntaxes. To approach the singularity, the ephemeral. But perhaps it is impossible to describe with any spiritual or soul accuracy (I do not speak of feeling), without counting how, where and when it happened, without framing it, because it is precisely when it interrupts the narrative that the dissolving force of the landscape is felt (Idem, 177).

Lyotard emphasizes here the difference between narrating and showing. In the narrative, the spirit keeps the power over time: The spirit controls time, while the landscape takes time (Idem). It is in the texture of the writing, in the written signs that one can indicate the breath that snatches the spirit into the abyss when the landscape happens (Idem, 178). Lyotard continues:

In the description, writing tries to face the challenge of being equivalent to its absence at that very moment (when the landscape rises before the spirit). Not only is it always too late (nostalgia), but the words themselves seem outrageously heavy, I mean miserable and arrogant, to designate the fullness of that state of emptiness (...). Poetry is born out of the understanding of this misery, otherwise it would be nothing more than the display and realization of the powers of language. It is the writing of the impossible description, the *DÉCRITURE* (the undone writing) (...) What is at stake in the poetic description is the matter as landscape, and not the ways in which the matter can be inscribed. Poetry tries not to domesticate the forms that form language, not to provide the inscription that retains the event (of the landscape). It tries to transmit the withdrawal (the retreat) (Idem).

Finally, another word that Lyotard spelled in capital letters:

COMPLAINT: it is said that they (landscapes) come from an imaginary space-time. I think they have nothing to do with imagination, in

the usual sense of the word (including in Lacan), with a synthesis, even if free, of forms. Where and when landscapes happen is not marked. (…) A COMPLAINT of the matter (I mean of the soul) against the webs in which the spirit imprisons it (Idem).

It is opportune to observe the use by Lyotard of the word soul on several occasions in the quotes listed here, which is worth repeating: " the debt that the soul contracted with the miserable and admirable indeterminacy (…)"; "instead of blood, it (landscape) makes a lymph flow, which is the soul"; "it may be impossible to describe with any spiritual or soul accuracy (…)"; "A COMPLAINT of matter (I mean of the soul)".

This allows us to establish relations between Lyotard's inhuman and the conception of soul, or psyche, defended by James Hillmann in the seminal *Re-visioning Psychologie,* published in 1975. Such relationships with psychology are of interest because, as a disciplinary field, psychology is also an "applied science" and committed to human demands as much as are engineering, architecture, urbanism and landscaping.

De-humanize / De-moralize

Hillman proposes "dehumanizing" as a condition for the cultivation of the soul. By adopting archetypal psychology as a fundamental basis for psychotherapeutic treatment, he clarifies that archetypal psychology is not humanism (Hillman, 2010, 327). He also says that it is necessary to distinguish between psyche and human (Idem, 329): "of these two notions, psyche and human, the psyche is the most comprehensive [...]. The soul enters everything that belongs to man and is in everything that is human" (Idem, 330).

But the reverse does not apply: "the human does not enter everything that belongs to the soul [...]. Thus, the soul is not confined to man, and

there is much of the psyche that extends beyond the nature of man. The soul has non-human corners" (Idem, 330).

From the distinction between psyche and human beings, on the one hand, and from the idea that the soul extends beyond human nature, on the other, Hillman can conclude that our soul does not belong to us. For therapeutic purposes, the different psychic persons who inhabit us belong to the archetypes, and they affect us "not by our will (...), but by factors that are independent of our power. (Idem, 334).

The afflictions and emotions that affect us seem to be centrally ours, however, says Hillman, "they are external to the individual person. (...) they are what we have in common: they transcend history and locality; (...) we feel them in the gestalt of landscapes and natural things (...) (Idem, 335).

Hillman continues: "Emotion is a gift that comes through surprise, it is more a mythical statement than a human property (...). We are not entirely ourselves when we suffer strong affections, and thus not so humanly responsible for what is not our property. (...) when free from human centrality, reverted (...) to mythical standards, emotions have a different quality of experience (Idem, 336).

Hillman also recommends "de-moralizing the psyche of the moralistic fallacy (which) is central to the myth of the man at the centre [...] an ego identified with itself" (Idem, 338).

What does not fit anthropocentric standard "becomes inhuman, psychopathic or bad" (Idem, 339). Instead of looking at myths morally, Hillman proposes, through archetypal psychology, to look at moralities mythically (Idem, 340). In his critique of the psychology of modern humanism, Hillman makes observations about psychology that could be useful for landscaping:

> "Psychology as an independent field is only possible if we

> keep our focus on the psyche, and not on what we now believe to be human. When we lose this focus on the psyche, psychology becomes medicine or sociology or practical theology, or anything, but not itself. It is remarkable how, in all these fields, the soul is secondary or absent; the psyche is reduced to a factor or a function of something more literal. Psychology collapses within these different structures of humanism when it loses the courage to be itself, which means the courage to jump qualitatively beyond humanistic assumptions, beyond man in the personal sense, beyond the psyche in the humanistic sense. Making a soul means de-humanizing" (Idem, 342).

When referring to the inhumanity of Greek humanism, Hillman observes that the human depends not on personal relationships, but on relationships with archetypal powers in their non-human aspects (Idem, 360). He also draws attention to the fact that the Greeks conceived the soul in resemblance to the gods, who are nor human; therefore, the soul is *a priori* intrinsically related to the inhumanity of the gods (Idem, 363). Soon afterwards, Hillman completes his argument saying that, for the Greeks, "The human was unthinkable without its inhuman background. Staying away from the personified archetypal reality meant to be separated from the soul" (Idem).

Therefore, both Hillman, in the mid-1970s, and Lyotard, a decade later, by invoking the soul (the first) and the inhuman (the second), affirm the need to overcome anthropocentrism to liberate philosophy and psychology from the webs of humanism and, thus, be able to resist the inhuman that Lyotard identified with development of the capitalist system.

It is worthwhile for landscape designers to consider the landscape approach proposed by Lyotard, as the soul (*anima*), in landscape experience, rises before the spirit (*animus*) and dominates it, burns it, providing

openings that could have strong repercussions in the project's poetics. Equal attention deserves to be given to Hillman's archetypal psychology, as this author, in addition to invoking the importance of myths – how much wealth the mythical perspective could bring to thinking about landscape! – still offers an original interpretation on the climb to Mount Ventoux supposedly made by Petrarch in April 1336, a feat that would have opened, according to some authors[2], the modern sensitivity to landscape.

If, normally, the experience of Petrarch is known as "The Ascent to Mount Ventoux", for Hillman, "the crucial event is the descent, the return downwards, to the valley of the soul" (Hillman, 2010, 372), that is, the introspection that follows the spectacle offered from the top of the mountain. Petrarch realizes, opening at random a page of Augustine's Confessions, that the greatness of the world is tiny when compared to the greatness of the soul. According to Hillman's interpretation, what made an impact on Petrarch was that he realized that the soul, being within man, is incomparably greater than him (Hillman, 2010, 371). This paradox must be accepted: "There are both man and soul, and the two terms are not identical, even if they are internally and inherently related" (Idem).

Hillman further notes that

> "Augustine and Petrarch apply three different terms: man,

2 The origin of sensitivity to the landscape is a controversial topic. Among the authors who admit that it occurred at the beginning of the modern era, can be cited: Jacob Burckhardt, A cultura do renascimento na Itália: um ensaio, trad. Sérgio Tellaroli, São Paulo: Companhia de Bolso, 2013; Joachim Ritter, Paysage. Fonction de l'esthétique dans la societé moderne, Besançon: Les Éditions de L'Imprimeur, 1997. Among those who refute this interpretation are Gianni Carchia, "Per uma filosofia del paesaggio", in Paolo D'Angelo (org.), Estetica e paesaggio, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009; Giorgio Agamben, O uso dos corpos (Homo sacer, IV, 2), São Paulo: Boitempo, 2014, 111-115.

> nature and soul. Man can turn outward, towards mountains, plains and seas, or inward, to the corresponding images; however, neither the external objects nor the internal objects are mine, much less human. Renaissance psychology begins with the revelation of the independent reality of the soul – the revelation of psychic reality to Petrarch, on Mount Ventoux. The concrete mountains were not his because he saw them; the internalized image of the mountains was not his because he imagined them. Imaginal facts have the same objective validity as the facts of nature. None of them belong to man, none are human. The soul is not mine, there is an objective, non-human psyche". (Idem, 371-372).

The mythical perspective is opportune to address the landscape. Such an approach is present, as Gianni Carchia points out, in Plato's *Phaedrus*. In this *dialogue*, Socrates is outside the city walls with his feet in the waters of Ilissos, enjoying the softness of the grass and the shade of a plane tree, listening to the sound of cicadas on the mid-summer day; in other words, he is having an aesthetic enjoyment of the landscape. At the same time, he did not feel comfortable, he felt like an alien, and said: "I am dedicated to learning (but) trees will teach me nothing (Plato, 2012, 15).

Socrates then made a move to return to the city, but as soon as he listened to his *daimon*, he obeyed his words and gave up the idea of turning back. He then started talking to Phaedrus about divine madness, beauty and love, which are matters that escape the domain of reason and, in some way, concerns precisely the landscape, the experience of landscape that he was going through in that landscape on that specific occasion.

The landscape does not deny the city, but poses questions for it. Burning the spirit, a fundamental requirement for landscape experience, does not imply succumbing definitively to the illogical (the spirit never burns

completely, ponders Lyotard), but it is necessary to attend to the inhuman of childhood, to the myths, which are not human. In the introduction of *A atualidade o mito* (*The topicality of the myth*), Gennie Luccioni says that the myth is knowledge in its origin. It expresses the desire to know and it only remains alive as long as it remains open to the desire for knowledge (when it stiffens in scientific theory or in a metaphysical system, it dies) (...). Then the word it bears – which is sacred and secret – becomes the object of ritual transmissions; it is the mythical word (Luccioni, 1977, 7).

> "It is necessary to recognize: the myth of our time still exists elsewhere [...]. It exists wherever men meet. From the group comes the story without a father; this because the myth already existed, before history, being at the same time concealment and celebration, oblivion and perpetuation of the beginning" (Idem, 9).

At a conference that took place in March 1988 in Kyoto, Claude Lévi -Strauss, gave a very valuable testimony regarding the relationship between landscape and myth. In 1985, for the first time, Lévi-Strauss had visited the holy places in the Middle East, and the following year, in 1986, he went to visit the places where the founding events of the oldest Japanese mythology were supposed to have happened, on the island of Kyushu. Despite his origins and culture, Lévi-Strauss was more sensitive to what he saw in Japan than to what he saw in Israel:

> "Mount Kirishima, where Ninigi-no-mikoto came down from heaven, Ama-no-iwa-to-jinja, in front of the cave where Ohirume, the goddess Amaterasu, was locked, aroused in me deeper emotions than the place where the temple of David was supposedly located, than the Bethlehem cave, than the Holy Sepulchre or the tomb of Lazarus" (Strauss, 2011, 15).

Lévi-Strauss explained this curious inversion in the following way: the West, which also has its myths, strives to distinguish between myths and history (Idem: 16). For Western thinking, myths are not worth considering as they are not "confirmed events". Therefore, the important thing is to locate precisely the places where such events consigned by tradition took place. But the following question immediately comes to mind: what guarantees that things happened right there? "Even if he does not doubt the truth of the Scriptures, the visitor with an objective spirit does not necessarily question the events reported, but the places shown to him as being exactly those where such events have occurred" (Idem). On the other hand, in Kyushu, either on Mount Kirishima (where Ninigi-no-mikoto descended from heaven[3]), or in the Ama-no-iwa-to-jinja temple (where Amaterasu, the sun goddess, locked herself in the cave with her brother and brought the night down on Earth until the spirit of joy came),

> "we bathe in a frankly mythical atmosphere. The question of historicity is not imposed, or, more precisely, is not relevant in this context. Without causing embarrassment, two sites may even dispute the honour of having welcomed the god Ninigi-no-mikoto on his descent from heaven. In Palestine, places without intrinsic quality are required to be enriched by the myth, but only insofar as it does not intend to be a myth: as places where something really happened; nothing, however, certifies that it was truly there. Conversely, in the case of Kyushu, they are sites of unparalleled

3 Ninigi-no-Mikoto (瓊瓊 杵 尊) (Also called Ame-nigishi-kuni-nigishi-am-atsuhiko-hiko-ho-no-Ninigi-no-Mikoto) is, in Japanese mythology, the grandson of the goddess Amaterasu, who sent him to Earth to teach knowledge about rice planting and rule the world (this is, pacify Japan). To fulfill this task Amaterasu equipped him with three treasures known as the Imperial Reliquary of Japan.

> splendour that enrich myths, add an aesthetic dimension to them and make them both present and concrete" (Idem, p. 16-17).

It is worth repeating: landscape experience demands the outbreak of the spirit, an instant of suspension of its cunning, demands and judgments. It demands its deactivation. "If the world is the ineffectiveness of the animal environment, Agamben says, the landscape is the ineffectiveness of ineffectiveness; it is being disabled" (Agamben, 2017, 115). Landscape is fulguration. Without neglecting the technical knowledge and pragmatic demands that it must meet, perhaps the essential thing in teaching landscape projects is to linger in this lightning in order to transmit it, to pass it on, even if only in its pale reflexes. The duration of the landscape experience, in the terms in which we treat it here, may not go beyond an instant, but it is worth betting on the power of poetry and also on the possibilities of landscape poetics to make it last or, at least, to suggest it, to refer to it, to make it emerge through the techniques of landscape design, certainly impregnated by philosophy and mythology. Why couldn't all this happen even in the city?