Landscape Architecture and Shapes

Filipe Lacerda Neto

1University of Beira Interior, Calçada Fonte do Lameiro, Edifício II Engenharia, 6200-001 Covilhã, Portugal
filipe.lacerda.neto@ubi.pt

Abstract. Nowadays, the word landscape is used to name very different realities and, frequently, very far from its original meaning, which is connected to the rural territory. The adjectives that are usually used with it help to define its meaning and to extend the conceptual framework in which the word landscape is integrated. Therefore, we can talk about the interior landscapes, musical landscapes, artistic landscapes, poetical landscapes or human landscapes. Creating contextual architecture means incorporating into the project data, guidelines or relations imprinted in the territory or a place of the intervention. This amounts to link the architectural work with the structures which define the area where it will be located. The new intervention becomes another layer of the process of transformation and it can be consistent or collide with what already exists, in terms of the form. This document aims to fulfil the primary need of pointing with precision the conceptual framework in which what has been defined as the Landscape Architecture and Shapes is integrated. It is a discipline that studies the analysis and assessment of the material, environmental and formal conditions of the landscape, but always oriented towards the production of open spaces through the project and the implementation of the specific techniques. This article intends to offer a broad and systematic perspective of the different aspects involved in the Landscape Architecture, with the support of relevant examples of the culture of the landscape.

1. Introduction

The aim is to address various issues that converge in the improvement of the quality of the built environment, using the assumptions of an idea of well-being, which include sensorial or perceptive values as a starting point. All knowledge contributions that facilitate a relationship between architecture and nature the least conflictual way possible are important here. Therefore, we are moving away from the connotation of that predatory urbanism that stimulates the metastasis of building of the physical environment. We are especially interested in developing a doctrine of the architectural practice that encourages the careful integration of the built in the physical support, according to the landscape aesthetics. We believe that a method is needed for the coordinated action and the search for formal harmony, in order to prevent the pillage of valuable places by means of reckless or careless interventions. In addition, we intend to focus on the convenience of achieving a symbiosis between habitat and territory, considering geomorphological and environmental values. It involves taking advantage of an interdisciplinary stronghold where the integrative sense of the architectural project establishes the synthesis of the aspects in question in the public space.

This document aims to be considered as a study that acts as an intermediary between subjects related to urbanism, landscape and design of the public space.
2. Landscape sensitivity
Not all cultures have developed a sensitivity towards the landscape. In the old Chinese world, in the Taoist and Confucian context, landscape can be seen in literature, while in the West we cannot talk about a culture of contemplation before the 15th century, except some names such as Petrarch and Saint Francis of Assisi.

The original meaning of Landscape is a piece of land considered in its aesthetic-artistic aspect; the presence of both natural and artificial elements is recognised, including the geographical one.

2.1. Attitudes of humankind towards nature
We will consider two attitudes of humankind towards nature: the physical reality – used in productive terms; and, much later than the first one, the aesthetic-landscape reality – the enjoyment of nature (the aesthetical pleasure of nature is relatively recent).

In “Short Treaty of Landscape”, Alain Roger states that for peasants the land is land, so we need to work it; it is not a place of contemplation. These workers do not see the land as an aesthetic effect, but a place where they can catch a cold, or more strictly, sweat and break their back. For that reason, Paul Cézanne complained about the locals who lived in the surroundings of Sainte-Victoire Mountain, which has only become a special place when Cézanne painted it (figure 1).

Thus, the landscape is a piece of land considered in its aesthetic-artistic aspects (natural elements + artificial elements), where we should not exclude the geography where the man carried out a strong intervention.

Alain Roger talks about an extract of Oscar Wilde’s “The Decay of Lying” as a Copernican resolution in the concept of landscape. The extract, which is part of a text written as a dialogue between two friends, Vivian y Cyril, is the following:

“The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to this particular school of Art. You smile. Consider the matter from a scientific or a metaphysical point of view, and you will find that I am right. For what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till the Art had invented them” [1].

Thus, Roger uses a word used by Charles Lalo, who took it from Montaigne, to refer to the theory of “artealising” nature. Roger considers that it is important to remind the artists that the land does not necessarily mean the landscape and to turn one into the other there is always artistic work behind.
From today’s perspective, we can consider that there are three conceptions of how human being considers landscape:

1. Economistic – man seeks profitability:
   a) Physiocracy (18th century): it assumes that the wealth of people comes from the land. Nature supports well-being, we should explore but also take care of the land.
   b) Productivism: e.g. Mining.
   c) Mercantilism: soil turns into an object of business. The more mercantilist the society is regarding the use of soil, the worse it is for architecture – if money stays on the soil, it will never be used in construction.

2. Ecological / Environmental.

3. Aesthetic / Landscape.

2.2. Romantic perspective
Romanticism introduced the concept of the picturesque (what is worthy of painting) in the “place”. Picturesque becomes an artistic theme thanks to the artists. In many authors, dealing with the image – which does not necessarily reproduce a real landscape – involves sensitivity in the dialogue between nature and construction or intervention. Karl Friedrich Schinkel was seen as classical and romantic, which is almost a contrast, since romantic is considered anticlassical – there is no architecture, but romantic scenarios; architecture takes part in romantic scenes (figure 2).
Figure 2. Mont Saint-Michel, Benedictine Abbey: it represents a successful symbiosis or synthesis between geological and aesthetic [3]

Romantic culture will glorify the landscape as it had never been done before. We see the development of concepts such as “the sublime”, that is, it causes cathartic emotions. The romantic culture itself will create landscape actions through painting and literature.

The culture of the landscape is one of the superior expressions of the civic culture of a society. Romanticism starts considering aspects that are distant from the classical culture, for example the effectivism of the light – focused lightening, tenebrism, sunset – or the meteorological. The interest in vernacular cultures, the rural and the picturesque arise.

Gradually, we see the recognition that the landscape sensitivity has been developed as art became an intermediary between the physical and urban environments. As a consequence of a picturesque tradition, the picturesque was what was deserved to be painted.

Going back to Alain Roger, in his treaty he considers that recognising the value of landscape is not a result of direct contemplation, but it is the result of the mediator action of its interpretation carried out by art.

2.3. The Cultural
¿When does the cultural appear in landscape?

1. When there is a recognition of cultural presence in the territory.
2. When we carry out an artistic reading of the territory.
Thus, talking about the cultural landscape is redundant, the landscape is already cultural. On the one hand because we recognise cultural presence in it; on the other hand because we carry out an aesthetic-artistic reading.

2.4. Environment
The environment is the surrounding character of the place, where there is a multisensorial apprehension of the space, the sociocultural aspects of the environment and human presence; it has a subjective dimension, it has to do with the aura of the places (figure 3) – its atmosphere. It is like a person’s glamour.

Rosario Assunto conceives the landscape as a visual form of atmosphere. The territory is the basic matter used by the landscape, the physical extension or portion of the Earth’s crust, including the human changes. It is important to highlight the multisensoriality and the participation of the human being when building that environment – e.g. festive atmosphere.

Figure 3. Historic Centre of Florence, Italy [4]

Pre-humankind natural landscapes already have an identity before man settles in the territory – monuments of the nature, or sculptural rocks. Aldo Rossi said that monuments are the architectural parts that are most resistant to the market. What can landscape do to keep up with architecture? Or should we think: what can the architect’s intervention do in the architecture’s favour – human landscapes (urban and rural).
The landscapes of archaeological ruins acquire a romantic character for themselves. Architects should be interested in landscapes designed with an artistic intention – clear relationship between nature and artifice: one thing is the territory as a receptacle, another thing is the territory modified, which is usually the case of architecture. The artistic intention is given by the artist, but this is not enough. It is a necessary perspective of artistification that is given by the spectator.

3. Basic types of landscape

3.1. Natural or pre-mankind landscape

¿When does the cultural appear in landscape?

a) Desert
b) Mountain
c) Jungle
d) Maritime

![Figure 4. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil [3]](image-url)
3.2.2. Urban: although sometimes the terms urban landscape and urban atmosphere are used interchangeably, they are not exactly the same.

3.2.3. Industrial: they have a particular aesthetics, not always contemptible.

3.2.4. Archaeological: sometimes they are almost a simple texture, other times volumetric.

3.2.5. Designed: with an aesthetic-artistic intention – gardens or free urban spaces (these are designed with a utilitarian willingness).

Society must make progress, by increasing the degree of construction in the physical and technological environment. This unidirectional process must be reformulated. Botanic spaces can prevail, they still make sense, and built landscapes are justified in golden spaces, conceived as a work of art.

In most cases, we will most likely encounter the landscapes of mixed identity. There are dialogues between things, but this can result in some confrontation – the ideal is having landscapes that dialogue with each other. The mixed identity of landscapes represents much curiosity.

3.3. An artistic perspective of the landscape

We should not mistake the artistic perspective for the perspective of artistification: in the first one the aesthetic baggage is given by the artist, in the second one the spectator is the one who provides that aesthetic baggage.

The work of landscapes with an artistic willingness is extremely wide:

1. Happenings, by Spencer Tunick, where he portrays naked groups of people.

2. Gardens, as a mediator intervention between nature and culture. Observing an image of a garden or orchard that was handled with certain naturalism, we can think that this aesthetics may be a result of a search for an unreachable paradise (figure 5).

3. Land Art, in which we can distinguish two types of intervention:
   a) Placement of an object in a well-chosen context.
   b) Artistic intervention of the area / place in question – known as Earth Work.

Figures 5. Sanssouci Palace, Potsdam, Germany [3]
In any case, the understanding we may have about the work of artists like Ortega Muñoz (landscaper of plateau from Castilla-La Mancha) increases the aesthetic aspects we will value when contemplating a landscape.

4. Culture Levels or Cultural Spheres

1. Illustrated Culture.

2. Popular or vernacular culture, also known as ethnoculture: Johann Gottfried von Herder is the philosopher that represents the idea of the essential role of nations, since each one of them has a particular spirit. Herder defines it as creative strengths that live unconsciously in each region and they are shown in the particular creations of each people, especially language, but also poetry, history or law.

3. Mass culture.

These culture levels can intertwine or hybridise with one another. This is the case of Villa Medici by Michelozzo (figure 6), where we have side by side the ethnoculture and illustrated culture present in the smooth hills, the indigenous species of vegetation – cypresses –, in popular architectures and in Renaissance villas.

Figure 6. Villa Medici, 1458, Fiesole, Italy [3]
Regarding the industrial aesthetics, we must not forget to mention Tony Garnier. This French architect of the beginning of the 20th century, produced between 1904 and 1914 a series of propositional images of a prototype of a city for 35,000 inhabitants, in which he brings together industrial and metropolitan aesthetics. He called it *Cité Industrielle*.

In the 19th century a certain industrial, non-aesthetic or counter-aesthetic aesthetics develops. Schinkel, in his visit to Manchester, produces a series of drawings in his travel notebook that reflects the progress, which is seen as a source of concern but also as a source of a certain aesthetic valuation. This aesthetic valuation of the industrial and the metropolitan was mainly developed with the vanguards, especially the Russian constructivism and the Italian Futurism, and more recently, the famous group Archigram – Peter Cook is still active – and the Japanese Metabolism.

5. Landscape valuation
Under the current circumstances of urban development, that is, in the limiting moment we are now, in which we need to adopt a policy of safeguard, otherwise we will not be able to save anything, it is really important to create a conservative conscious of the landscape, an ethic of no construction. This ethic of no construction implies the architect’s self-control against the desire to build: it is necessary to learn to not build. A process of demolition and restructuring or regeneration of the environment built will be enough. Whether for the inherent decadence of the structures or for the low architectural quality.

How do we determine the naturalist value of a territory?

We can consider a series of fundamental parameters:

1. The botanical or edaphologic character that determines the quality of the soil.
2. The purity or lack of change of the aquifers and atmosphere.
3. The presence of wild fauna.
4. The presence or absence of infrastructures and networks.

In any case, the natural landscape is a scarce resource, so this means it needs protection and preservation, but it also means that it is more and more valuable. Urbanistic administrative actions put a great pressure on natural territories. In order to protect it, we need many motivations of a commercial, productive or touristic nature. The value, the natural landscape has in it does not seem enough.

Nowadays, we consider the paradigm of a hypothetical society that could live without the joy of landscape. This society would be characterised by a super-urbanite man, who feeds on simulations of spaces produced by the screen; where the existential space is replaced by cyberspace. This character lives in the culture of imaginary spaces, based on the image that activates his imagination; aesthetic pleasure suffers, and it prevents him from enjoying natural beauty – he moves away from the natural environment –, while he becomes a misanthropic and asocial urbanite. In Japan, this is called *Otaku*, that is, Petrarca’s antinomy.

6. Conclusions
The role of the architecture depends on the degree of anthropization of the landscape and it should be calibrated according to the pre-built or not built places. In the virgin territories the election of the formal language is not a relevant matter. The size, the height, the fragmentation of the elements that are parts of it, or their adaptation to the land, are much more important.
The “conflict” of the landscapes of the mixed identity makes us consider the relationship between the architecture and the pre-existences of the place, especially the environmental conditions and the formal confrontation of the geomorphology. On the other hand, in the built contexts, the importance is given to the typological and stylistic elements, as well as aspects that have to do with the composition, formal redundancy, or homogeneity - to some extent; “genius loci” is also in these constructions.

We should emphasise that the concept of the landscape implies an artistified perspective of the territory where the concept of culture takes action. The emphasis is given to the treaties and characters of history, like Oscar Wilde and Alain Roger, who defend the perspective of artistification of a landscape in his “Short Treaty of Landscape” – people, objects or cultural references that have to do with the culture of the place also take action in the landscape.

The more we know about the nature, the more the society is far from it – there is a real distance of the citizens towards the nature –, where the super-urbanite is a character of a great prominence. He lives far from the nature, which makes it difficult for him to understand “the natural beauty”. He feeds on fictions and digital spaces, and we can even talk about “cyber-landscapes” in a cyberspace. The culture is mainly developed for the screen. The fiction replaces reality; therefore, the human is more and more distant from the natural environment. The city’s public spaces of socialisation tend to decrease more and more; before they were places of charm, now they are places of transit. In the contemporary world, almost everything can be unpredictable. There are no more rules. The chaos is an extremely complex rule, so it is not perceptible; on the other hand, the order is a fundamental tendency in the nature, where the notion of landscape implies the perceptible recognition and an emotional valuation.

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