

NATURE AND LANDSCAPE: THE DUAL FACE OF THE MOUNTAIN

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ABSTRACT: Why do we admire and climb mountains? To discuss this topic, we begin by explaining the conceptual differences between nature and landscape and how the aesthetic experience of landscape occurs, with the support of the Philosophy of Landscape. Based on the historiography of the landscape and the literature of art, we continue to narrate the historical path of the cultural invention of the mountain within the universal imaginary, in which it asserted itself as a double reality, nature, and landscape. This condition made it admired and experienced by their natural attributes and immaterial and affective values. It also gives it a strategic value: climbing mountains is both an aesthetic and physical experience that incites us to think, enriches our senses and imagination, fundamental to our awareness of the world. Over the mountain, we can see beauty or destruction, and this leads us into ethical positions. The decision, in landscape, is topological.

KEYWORDS: Mountain. Nature. Landscape. Aesthetic experience of landscape.

NATUREZA E PAISAGEM: A DUPLA FACE DA MONTANHA

RESUMO: Por que admiramos e subimos montanhas? Para discutir essa questão, iniciamos esclarecendo as diferenças conceituais entre natureza e paisagem e como se dá a experiência estética paisagística, subjetiva e objetiva ao mesmo tempo, com o apoio da Filosofia da Paisagem. Na sequência, com base na historiografia da paisagem e na literatura da arte, narramos a invenção cultural da montanha no imaginário universal, no qual afirmou-se como uma realidade compósita, natureza e paisagem. Essa condição a faz admirada e visitada tanto pelos seus atributos naturais quanto pelos imateriais e afetivos. Dá-lhe também um valor estratégico: subir montanhas é uma experiência física e estética que nos incita a pensar, enriquece os nossos sentidos e imaginação, fundamentais para a nossa consciência de mundo. Do seu alto alcançamos tanto belezas quanto destruição e isso nos conduz a posicionamentos éticos. A decisão, em paisagem,

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é topológica

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Montanha. Natureza. Paisagem. Experiência estética paisagística.

Introduction

The landscape category is polysemic, with countless definitions, depending on the disciplinary field in which the object of investigation is located. The best-known can be grouped into three groups: those that understand the landscape as a cultural or artistic representation, a reading that is based on discourses, philosophical, aesthetic, and moral systems; those that understand the landscape as the constructed and inhabited territory itself, and it's mainly interested in how it was organized and prioritizing morphological, structural, and functional analyses; and those that understand it as relational, a phenomenal event that occurs in the concrete experience of a body-spirit situated in the world. However, this organization is merely classificatory and has little practical meaning. It is unlikely that a good landscape study will not include more than one of them.

Likewise, I believe that searching for a single concept of landscape, which is intended to be universal and applicable to all objects of study, is unproductive since empirical landscape contexts are unique and generally demand different theoretical and methodological approaches. In landscape, it is the object of study that gives rise to the approach to be adopted, and it is from this that the conceptual cosmos that will face its problems is constructed.

Studying landscape requires a tactical positioning. Thinking about landscape is knowing where to think. In this regard, the French philosopher Charles Pegúy treats the landscape as a philosophy deeply engaged in the world, a “wandering, struggling”

exercise of an experience that arises from the folds of things, restoring their solidity and depth from them. For him, “the world and the spirit present themselves to the eye not as a panorama, but as a succession of positions that must be taken, won or lost” (BESSE, 2006, p. 97).

The landscape in Pegúy is a state of knowledge in which things are no longer banal environmental facts but incitements of the senses. “There are sensitive areas that one must know how to find, reach, approach, know how to touch, or rather, know how to be touched, influenced, animated by them, to be able to think, speak, and write” (BESSE, 2006, p. 98). The landscape, for Péguy, is this sensitive zone.

We find a similar situation with other terms, such as nature, for example, which, precisely because of their polysemy, must be understood in the context in which they are explained or thought of.

To address the mountain as a dual reality, I refer to Georg Simmel's work *Philosophy of Landscape*, in which the philosopher argues that landscape is a category of human thought established when an observing subject and the observed object merge into the same unitive atmosphere. I also use the work *Paisagem e Estética*, by another philosopher, the Italian Rosario Assunto, to support the argument that the mountain, through the act of the subject who elevates it to the condition of the landscape, through sensitive experience, also appears as an expression of the meta-spatiality and meta-temporality of nature. Following this path, I discuss what the landscape aesthetic experience consists of.

Next, I describe how the mountain acquired the affective value it holds nowadays in the universal imagination, based on the literature of landscape historiography and art literature from the two main landscape traditions, the Chinese

and the Western, to conclude by defending the arguments: that the mountain is a sensitive, strategic point that incites us to think; that the mountain, through its presence in human history, is already part of our physical and metaphysical existence; that in the experience of climbing it or simply admiring it, the mountain becomes a dual reality: nature and landscape, materiality and ideality.

Landscape and Nature, a Necessary Distinction

In the entire landscape, attention is not paid to isolated objects, manifestations, or phenomena. If the environment can be broken down into its constituent parts, each of which can be described independently by its particular characteristics, in the landscape, it is precisely the unity that gives meaning to this set of things.

When and how does the landscape happen in us? Simmel (2013, p. 51) answers when something becomes chained to our spirit, in a kind of special event:

Landscape, we affirm, arises when a juxtaposition of natural phenomena spread across the territory is co-apprehended in a peculiar type of unity, different from others that encompass this same field of vision: of the scholar who thinks through causality, of the nature worshipper who feels religiously, of the farmer or strategist who is oriented teleologically.

In this sense, the landscape occurs when the perceiving subject unifies previously isolated elements or events, mountains, houses, people, sounds, and parties, into a sensitive, single, undivided whole. The unitive element, the amalgam that allows us to reconnect them into a new totality, Simmel calls *Stimmung*, which in a lasting or momentary way penetrates all the singular elements of the landscape, uniting them to man without it being possible to explain why this happens.

What flows from the event of the landscape in us is this *Stimmung*, unique to each moment of landscape apprehension and exclusive to that landscape. It is not tied to

any singular element but to the whole, to the arrangement of these elements in a sensitive set, in a single and same emotional act. If this does not happen, what we observe within our horizon is not yet a landscape. Still, merely the material for it “just as a pile of juxtaposed books is not yet a library, but will only become one when, without taking away or adding a single volume, a certain unifying concept comes to encompass it, giving it forms” (SIMMEL, 2013, p. 44).

In Simmel, nature is not yet a landscape, although every landscape contains nature within. What does he define, then, as nature that allows us to differentiate it from the landscape? First of all, nature does not support portions or cut-outs.

By Nature, we understand the infinite connection of things, the uninterrupted procreation and annihilation of forms, and the flowing unity of happening, expressed in the continuity of temporal and spatial existence. When we refer to an actual being as nature, we mean either an intrinsic quality, its difference from art and the artificial, from the ideal and the historical, or that which must function in it as a representative and symbol of that global being whose flow we hear whispering in it (SIMMEL, 2013, p. 41).

It is a theoretical impossibility to speak of a portion of nature since it is the unit of a whole. The water that runs in a stream, which passes through a particular place, will continue its flow to the ocean, which makes up the Earth, which in turn is part of a solar system, which is part of a galaxy, forming part of the whole that is the nature of the universe.

However, when this water is cut by us and regrouped with other elements, which will undergo the same type of action, is perceived and felt within a sensitive unity, it becomes part of our landscape.

This was the great formula invented in modernity when man's break with nature was consolidated due to a progressive distancing from the original cosmicity. Therefore, the invention of the modern landscape is a kind of compensation, an artifice that we built to reconnect with the lost whole, nature.

While nature is undivided, a totality without parts or fragments, the landscape is an apprehension that captures a particular moment in nature, constituting something individualized that only happens at that time and in that place.

If the nature that provides the material for the landscape is the same for everyone, why do we build our own? The answer is that the material nature gives us is so varied, with so many nuances, that different subjects will read and interpret it differently. Different personalities, desires, anxieties, and knowledge appear in this interpretation. If we unite two people in the same environment simultaneously, the two will form different landscapes.

If the landscaping act is individual, however, the way of perceiving and interpreting the landscape also has a collective dimension, as certain elements, whether natural or constructed, bring with them their meanings that have historically been built within a particular culture, which everyone learns to know and recognize.

The Aesthetic Experience of Landscape

Rosário Assunto, in *A paisagem e a estética*, argues that landscapes are a spatialization of time. For him, the only way to grasp time is through the records, material and immaterial, that it imprints on the landscape. These marks of time are recorded in their temporality, the evolutionary line that “preserves and prolongs the past in the present, and in the present anticipates the future in which the present made past will be preserved, prolonging itself in turn” (ASSUNTO, 2013, p.350).

A landscape is, therefore, the condensation of everything that constitutes the temporality of places, “from the historical and existential temporality of human life to

the co-presence of the multiple temporalities of the ages of the natural world: mineral, vegetable, and animal” (SERRÃO, 2013, p.107).

In the landscape, we are led to seek and reach other times, meta-temporality, and spaces, meta-spatiality, not contained in the finitude cut out by the reach of our senses. Meta-spatiality and meta-temporality are movements of thought that lead us to other spaces and times and bring from there what our memory and imagination capture, returning them to our landscape enjoyment.

Things are historically and slowly given meanings that are consolidated in the *doxa* of places, the common belief that carries the imaginary. Every landscape is a grammatical sentence, in which the most important affective objects summon meta-spatiality and meta-temporality: “in this way, in our completely ordinary journey through the landscape, we follow, without our knowledge, a narrative line, all constellated with figures of speech” (CAUQUELIN, 2007, p. 162).

In a state of landscape, the *topoi*² of specific things, towers, lakes, rivers, and houses, which bring together the metaphors and meanings socially sedimented in each culture and which we learn to decode as parts of it, bring their specific message to the landscape as a whole, in a rhetorical operation that Cauquelin (2007, p. 162) called “ordinary stylistics”: it happens without us theorizing about this event. Garden gnomes are reminiscent of magical figures and childhood stories, a lake evokes tranquility, and an aquarium evokes underwater landscapes. So do the presence of the church tower in the small village, the tolling bell, the prayer recited from the minaret, and the factory whistle. These material and immaterial elements that summon other spatialities and temporalities are narrative dispositifs that are part of the landscaping act and already

² For Aristotle, *topoi* are culturally constructed and accepted truths that function as narrative models.

attend the places we live in. They are not supernatural but cultural. And by inhabiting our places, they inhabit our gaze.

The aesthetic experience in the landscape is one that, through the door of the senses, captures and elaborates world ideas according to the frameworks of our cultural temporality. This is a vitalist aesthetic, one that occurs in the lived environment, in which aesthetic values are apprehended, at the same time, as subjective and objective. Or, as Berleant (1997) conceptualized, it is an *aesthetics of commitment*. In landscape, we are committed to and for the environment. We feel it and transform it, just as it transforms us. Hence, it is essential to work towards a qualified environment.

Landscape aesthetics differ from other forms of aesthetic enjoyment precisely because they come from an active immersion of the perceiving subject in the movement of the world. In the enjoyment of the landscape, besides simply being in the environment, this subject makes their thoughts travel allusively to a meta-spatiality and meta-temporality that surpass the restricted limits imposed by its geographical conformation, intertwining fantasies, desires, and critical reflection. It is a qualitative enjoyment in which what is seen, the sounds that are heard, the smells that are smelled, and the textures that are touched, together with personal memories and cultural values, give each subject a unique and non-transferable framework that configures and establishes the particular cosmos of each one. At that moment, the artistic form that lives embryonically in each of us begins to be activated, and we execute a work of art in its making.

It is similar to what an artist does: starting from what is seen, they capture reality and shape it according to their will and inspiration. In a certain way, this is what we also do in landscape constitution, “to a lesser extent, less founded on principles, in a more

fragmentary way and with uncertain limits” (SIMMEL, 2013, p. 45). In the landscape, we do not first rationalize and then feel it. “The act that creates it for us is immediately an act that observes and an act that feels, which only subsequent reflection dissociates into these particularities” (SIMMEL, 2013, p. 51).

The Cultural Invention of the Mountain

The great mountains, these silenced
and sacred carriers³.

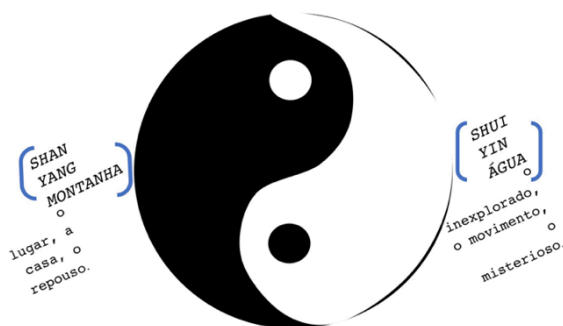
Man's first construction was the artificial mountain, which had magical value and was considered the connecting point between heaven and earth. Around it was established as the center of a world from which they oriented themselves amid chaos. The construction of this mountain creates a topographic feature that creates a fracture in the homogeneous surrounding space. Underneath it, they buried the dead, disguising the artificiality of this human action. The mountain appears in the cultural imagination as a sacred center of the world, and this imagination has been nurtured over the centuries.

Building the mountain as a symbolic form was a gesture that took centuries and that we began to do in the early days. In the Chinese landscape tradition, which started in the 4th century, the most traditional word for landscape is *shanshui*, which means mountain-water. It appears with this meaning for the first time in 353, in several poems from the *Orchid Pavilion Gathering*. Mountains, for the oldest Taoist thought, were part of a cosmophany: “The high sacred mountains were, therefore, places from which one would contemplate not the panorama of the earth, but rather the mysterious immaterial essence of its spirit” (SCHAMA, 1996, p. 408).

³ Victor Hugo in *La légende des siècles*, t. I, p. 72, *apud* Bachelard (2019, p. 286)

Water, in turn, for Taoism, is the metaphor for the thought of not acting, also shared by Confucianism, for which the main fight is to win by giving in. It represents the “humblest element, the most insignificant in appearance, which, although resisting nothing, nevertheless overcomes the resistance of materials considered more solid” (CHENG, 2008a, p. 213). Water is a symbol of the feminine, of *Yin*, representing the mysterious, the unexplored, which through its constant movement, without coercion, overcomes the mountain, symbolized by *Yang*, the masculine, rest, stillness, and, therefore, the place to establish a home (See Figure 1). For this reason, in Chinese landscape paintings, we also see huts, temples, or hermitages installed on mountains (See Figure 2). They are never placed on top, which is reserved for the abode of the immortals.

Figure 1: *Shanshui*: the mountain-water duo



Source: Prepared by the author, 2022.

In this tradition, the mountain-water interaction embodies universal transformation, in which human laws are also implicit. Chinese thinkers establish a relationship between the profound nature of mountain-water and human sensitivity. For Confucius, the man of heart is enchanted by the mountain; the man of intelligence enjoys the water (BESSA, 2021).

In this landscape aesthetic, man has in nature a fraternal mirror in which they can discover and improve themselves. Therefore, Chinese landscape painting is neither naturalistic nor animistic but an expression of the deep nature of man. “(...) The valley, for example, contains the mystery of a woman's body, the rocks speak of the tormented expressions of a man, etc. So, painting a landscape is portraying the man's feelings in it (...)” (CHENG, 2008b, p. 239 and 240).

Comparing Western landscape painting with Chinese painting, while in the former, the human figure dominates, which is enough to embody the beauty of the world, in Chinese painting, from the 9th and 10th centuries onwards, the landscape is privileged, which, by revealing the mysteries of nature, expresses the dreams, and deep desires of man. Chinese sages wandered through nature to capture these two dominant landscape elements – mountains and water – and recorded their perceptions and impressions in the arts of poetry and painting (BESSA, 2021).

The notion of emptiness, which in Chinese cosmology represents the original energy that gives rise to all beings, is not just a supreme state to strive for but a substance in all things. Present in Taoist, Confucian, Zen Buddhist, and Neo-Confucian thought, emptiness also plays a fundamental role in representing the mountain. It is this that allows the introduction of circular movement between mountain and water in the form of mist and clouds, and it is thanks to the latter, called *dragon veins* in the painting, that the mountain “seems to tend towards the water and the water towards the mountain (CHENG, 2008b, p. 167).

Figure 2: Huizong Zhao Ji (1082–1135 AD) – Song Huizong's Autumn Scenery in the axis of Xishan mountain – 宋徽宗溪山秋色圖. Song Dynasty (960–1127 AD)



Source: The National Palace Museum (Taipei)–Open Data Platform. Image number:
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Even today, the mountain's symbolic power remains vital in countries with a landscape matrix derived from China, such as Japan and Korea. In Japan, for centuries, Mount Fuji has been a national entity, having its own *kami*, which in Shinto belief is the spirit of the gods present in things, places, and events. Nowadays, peasants still revere

them in their deep communion with nature. Fuji has been an almost obligatory theme for painters and writers throughout Japan's long cultural trajectory. Professor Alain Roger reports the following personal anecdote involving Fuji, expressing its cultural importance to the Japanese. Once, at a landscape conference in Tokyo, he heard the following question: "Honorable colleague, we would like to know your opinion on the fate of Fuji. It is sick, it cracks, and collapses" (ROGER, 2007, p. 28). For 5 minutes, he answered the obvious, extolling the importance of Fuji as an ancient work of art and as a monument that needs to be saved, as one would save Versailles or Venice. According to him, those 5 minutes were worth more to the Japanese audience than his entire lecture of over an hour.

In North Korea, Mount Paektu, an extraordinary volcanic formation, 2,744 m high, on the border with China, was invented as the "holy land of the revolution," as it was there that Kim Jong Il, son and successor of the founder of the dictatorial regime, Kim Il Sung, was born, while he led the fight against the Japanese occupation. The propaganda of this regime carefully cultivates this myth of the sacred mountain, linking the succession to power exclusively to the descendants of the "Paektu bloodline," in this case, the Kim family. Current leader Kim Jong-un takes care to update it annually by visiting the mountain.

In the West, where, after classical antiquity, religion forbade the pleasure of aesthetic enjoyment of the world for centuries, the summits of high mountains were places of terror and trial, and since the beginning of Christianity, saints sought them out to purify themselves. "When they sought remote places to isolate from worldly luxury, the most austere Benedictines built monasteries, protected by inaccessible peaks" (SCHAMA, 1996, p. 430).

Only in pre-modernity, when emerging humanism made man more confident about leaving their medieval prison, did mountains begin to be rescued for the Western emotional imagination. And it is there that the historiography of the landscape places the symbolic inaugural milestone of its modern vision, the letter that Francesco Petrarca wrote to his friend and spiritual advisor, Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro, reporting his ascent, together with his brother, of Mount *Ventoux*, in the French Alps, on April 23, 1336.

At that time, it was uncommon to climb hills without reason, much less the *Ventoux*, almost 2,000 meters above sea level and lashed by the cold and dry mistral, blowing at 100, 200, even 300 km/hour, which, by the way, explains the name of the mountain. An old shepherd, whom the brothers met at the beginning of their journey, tried to dissuade them from their foolish purpose. What to do up there? Why face rocks and thorns? He had had his clothes torn, and his body wounded when he performed the same feat fifty years earlier! But the shepherd's warnings were enough to stir up the determination of those "young people" who were more determined than ever to continue (BARTALINI, 2007, p. 1).

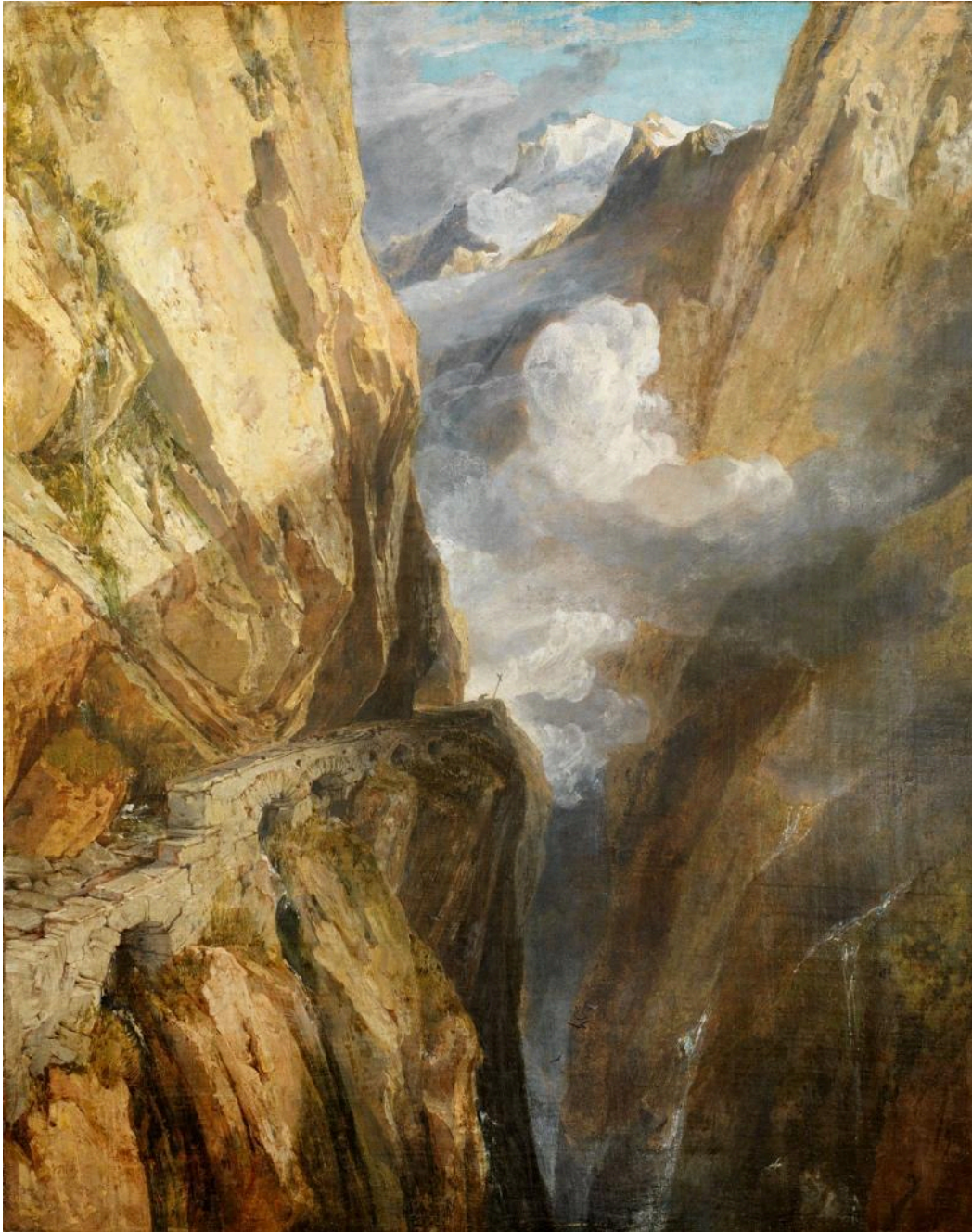
The report on Petrarch's climb, who, along with Dante, were considered the first humanists, highlights a personal conflict between physical and metaphysical effort, which represents that of humanity at that historical moment: to continue in medieval darkness with God or to continue towards the destiny of an autonomous man and master of their destiny, free to see, experience, and know the world.

After a challenging climb, reaching the top of the mountain, the poet rejoices with the view he has achieved, realizing that, from above, the distant becomes close. But "satiated almost to the point of drunkenness," he realized that this vision was taking him away from himself. He opens the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, which he had brought with him, and reads the following passage: And men go forth to wonder at the heights of mountains, the vast waves of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the extent of the ocean, and the courses of the stars, and omit to wonder at themselves.

In the opinion of Simon Schama (1996, p. 422), the Italian poet's letter became emblematic for expressing, in the transition from the Middle Ages to pre-modernity, the most acute dilemma of the generation of humanists of the time: “the problematic relationship between empirical knowledge and devout introspection.”

Art and humanist intellectual thought became largely responsible for reintroducing the mountain into the Western gaze after the long period of darkness imposed by religion. For example, the painter William Turner (1775-1851) depicts it and shows it in his fascination with the Alps. In his painting, in addition to geology and botany, the architecture of bridges, monasteries, and bell towers insert the human act into his representation of a sublime mountain landscape. In *The Gotthard Pass*, Figure 3, painted in 1803–1804, Turner represents one of the most emblematic and difficult Swiss paths in the heart of the Alps, used since the 13th century and which is, historically, present in the creation of the Swiss patriotic landscape, deeply associated with its mountains to this day.

Figure 3: J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) – The Gotthard Pass, Switzerland (1803–04)



Source: Photograph by Birmingham Museums Trust. Creative Commons, Public Domain.

Artist representation reaffirms its symbolic value in all this effort to reinsert the mountain into the Western imagination. The mountain, in the story, “is the result of a long journey of signs” (CAUQUELIN, 2007, p. 94).

This artistic operation, according to Alain Roger (2007), operates on two fronts: first, it is artistically rendered *in visu*, that is, art shapes the imaginary and places it in representation, and only then is it artistically rendered *in situ*, an operation that means taking what is represented as a model and transposing it materially to places. For example, Roger cites the *Sainte-Victoire* mountain, which only entered the French landscape repertoire after Paul Cézanne (1839 – 1906) painted it. The artist said French peasants had never seen it until then. Only after Cézanne created art *in visu* Sainte-Victoire did the place become one of France's most important tourist attractions. The main routes that cross the massif, D10 and D17, are now called the Cézanne Route, and on them, one can see posters with the following words: *Cezanne's Landscapes*. And when a major fire devastated it in 1989, the authorities' immediate promise to appease the anxiety of French public opinion was that it would be “restored à la Cézanne, like a painting (...)” (ROGER, 2007, p. 26).

In Brazil, after remaining close to the sea for more than three centuries, the colonizer enters Minas Gerais's mountains of gold and diamonds. João Camillo de Oliveira Torres (2011), in *O homem e a montanha*, tells us that, if Minas is not just mountains, it was there that the institutions, sensibilities, habits, symbols, and practices that shaped Minas Gerais sociability were forged (TORRES, 2011).

From the 17th century onwards and throughout the 18th century, Minas Gerais attracted exploring colonizers, who were dazzled by its nature while also fearing it. The Mines

were also the place where a human enterprise would profitably transform raw nature: in the riverbeds, on the slopes of hills denuded by fires, there was always the expectation of finding gold, no matter if the price was consuming forests, extinguishing species, and sacrificing indigenous groups: after all, what was important was to expand the borders of the territory. They were, finally, the peculiar setting that nourished the artistic imagination of poets, cartographers, musicians, architects, sculptors, and painters, their legacy

remaining inscribed to this day in the history of the former captaincy (SOUZA, 2022, pp. 133 and 134).

Among so many brilliant artists and intellectuals who artistically transformed the mountains into the center of Minas Gerais culture, the 20th century bequeathed us Alberto da Veiga Guignard (1896–1962), who created a fantastic artistic vision of them. After settling in Minas, Guignard from Rio de Janeiro “will be taken by the same imagination of the stone that Antônio Cândido attributed to those Arcadians and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, another Minas Gerais native” (HERKENHOFF; FREIRE, 2010, p. 16).

The artist's Minas Gerais mountains unite the two landscape matrices that we discussed earlier: “there is something of the Western Renaissance (tribute to Leonardo) and the Chinese” (HERKENHOFF; FREIRE, 2010, p. 14). He thus revives a tradition from the gold-mining region of Minas Gerais, which in the mid-18th century had a significant Chinese influence, which could be found in saints, screens, portals, architecture, painted panels inside churches, and objects such as crockery, oratories, and clocks.

In his imaginary mountains, Guignard places houses, churches, bridges, roads, waterfalls, cemeteries, and fairs in the middle of a sea of mist, suspending them to float. He reinterprets the colonial urbanism of Minas Gerais, of Portuguese origin, essentially telluric, shaped to the line of the landscape, as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda once said, giving it a vaporous fluidity, typical of the Chinese matrix of the landscape. In this representation, the painter universalizes and immortalizes the landscape of Minas.

Populated by balloons or kites, Guignard's sky has the lightness of the floating birds that inhabit the Chinese scenes of Sabará and Mariana. In China, kites appeared more than 3 thousand years ago, and balloons and flying paper lanterns more than 2 thousand years ago. In Guignard, regardless of the light in the landscape, these toys in the sky define the time: it is day if there are kites or night if there are balloons (HERKENHOFF; FREIRE, 2010, p. 14).

Figure 4: Alberto da Veiga Guignard – Noite de São João (1961)



Source: Excerpt from (HERKENHOFF; FREIRE, 2010, p. 57). Casa Roberto Marinho Collection.

In Noite de São João (1961), Figure 4, kites, balloons, and lanterns mix with arched bridges that appear to overcome rocks and receive the Minas train. The bell towers are installed on the peaks, creating a dialogue between the fixedness of the stone and the movement of the forms. In mining towns, these bell towers were always acoustic disruptions when bells rang, altering perceived geology. They are also landmarks heavily charged with religiosity, helping man to participate in the surrounding cosmic universe. The act of this manifestation of the sacred in these bell towers is called by Mircea Eliade (1996) *hierophany*: something sacred that reveals itself.

Guignard's painting synthesizes the very essence of Minas Gerais' valuable cultural heritage, in which the mountain is not only a remarkable natural element but also a landscape loaded with symbolic elements that structure and organize the pilgrimage and the gaze.

Conclusion

In universal culture, the mountain is a landscape archetype of stability, mystery, spectacular forces, and isolation from life. It has also been established as a symbol of resistance, the part of matter that has not yet surrendered to gravity.

Its ascending nature, with vertiginous peaks and rocks, alive and full of energy, is a landscape of strength that induces dynamic contemplation. According to Bachelard (2019, p. 293), even asceticism in the mountains becomes “an active asceticism.”

The mountain did not exist for us until symbolism and art removed it from aesthetic indifference. The history of our civilizing process has become an accumulation of beliefs, myths, fables, and aesthetic, moral, and political instruments that, nowadays,

constitute a valuable heritage of humanity. It offers those who like to admire and climb them its ancient material, symbolic, and metaphorical repertoire to help the flight of the imagination, which, at high altitude, gains lightness and amplitude. Imagining has the role of creating meanings, offering new horizons, and pointing out paths beyond obviousness. Without imagining, the oneiric fades, the spirit hardens, and solutions become impoverished.

Climbing mountains helps us sharpen our senses, through which we connect with nature, and enrich our experience of seeing and our awareness of the world. In the silence of the mountaintop, vision reigns, and the horizon can be reached entirely freely at three hundred and sixty degrees. “Turning around the horizon, the dreamer takes possession of the entire earth. Dominates the universe (...) (BACHELARD, 2019, p. 300).

Our aesthetic experience in the mountains is, at the same time, objective, and subjective, physical, and metaphysical. Our natural part rediscovers the lost archaic links with the animal, mineral, and plant kingdoms in the creatures that inhabit it and in the materials that make it up. The other part of us, that of feelings and daydreams, is captured by its fascinating mysteries, going to meet its rich immaterial set. Both the mountain and man, at that moment, submissive, are now given over to the unpredictability of the landscape as a whole.

The view from above directed to the world is a privileged strategic position of knowledge and decision, the threshold that, while revealing beauty, can also show us our existential precariousness, destructive capacity, and profound misery, often calling us to review our actions and start over. The decision, in landscape, is always topological!

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