

# Introduction

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The concept of landscape revolves around a basic semantic ambiguity (Wylie 2007), well expressed by the different shades of meaning that the term assumes across different languages. “Landscape”, or “*Landschaft*”, of Germanic derivation, refers primarily a *real* portion of territory created, shaped, or acted upon by humans, while the term “*paesaggio*”, of Latin derivation, originally indicates a painting genre, i.e., the pictorial *image* of a place (D’Angelo 2014). On the one hand, therefore, the landscape is a unity of spatial elements, of natural and/or anthropic origin, which the subject of experience can discover, study, and inhabit (von Humboldt 1845, Sauer 1925); on the other hand, the landscape is the result of a “cultural” mediation capable of capturing a certain expressiveness, or *Stimmung*, in a given place, and of representing it artistically. Broadly speaking, it is also possible to recognise two corresponding human attitudes towards space; on the one hand, the landscape is fundamentally the territory as perceived by the inhabiting populations – the European Landscape Convention (2000) also refers to this type of consideration; on the other hand, landscape is the product of the gaze that the artist, but also an entire community projects onto space, applying not only its own sensibility, but also and above all the styles of vision dominant in its time (Gombrich 1960) and, with them, its values and interests (Cosgrove & Daniels 1989). On the one hand, therefore, the real and lived landscape, and on the other the represented and imagined landscape (Lefebvre 1974, Soja 1996, Howard 2011). These two dimensions of the landscape should not, however, be pitted against each other in a rigid dualism, but they rather intertwine and enliven each other, insofar as representations always spring from the engaged encounter of observer and spatial datum (Merleau-Ponty 1948) and at the same time contribute to defining the practices and experiences of

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inhabitants and travellers (Casey 2002). The unitary background that allows to productively address this fundamental ambiguity of landscape is precisely that of “perception” (European Landscape Convention 2000). Even so-called non-representational theories (Thrift 2008), while denying that the landscape can be resolved in representation by a subject pretentiously assumed to be the pure eye of the world, recognise that the specificity of the notion of landscape lies in its being perceived by the inhabitants, and that this perception is implicit and operative in all the practices that take place there on a daily basis (Lorimer 2005). This inevitably leads us to the fundamental aesthetic nature of landscape, meaning, of course, not the narrow dimension of a theory of beauty in art, but the broader dimension of the investigation of perception and its relationship with reality. The careful consideration of landscape as, at the same time, a structure and infrastructure of common living (Jackson 1984, Olwig 1996, Settis 2013) and an aesthetic configuration with an extraordinary impact on general culture (Roger 1997, Milani 2017) necessitates a more general reframing of philosophical aesthetics, as anticipated in Italian philosophy by Assunto (1973) and then supported in Anglo-Saxon aesthetics by thinkers such as Berleant (1991, 2010) and in French cultural geography by authors such as Berque (2022) and Besse (2017).

The importance of perception for the definition of landscape entails the consequent acknowledgement of the plurality of means and languages with which perception is constructed in the most diverse contexts. The perception of the landscape is never a neutral fact, but is constructed in relation to a heritage of representations codified in different expressive media and sedimented over time. This is of course all the truer in the digital age, characterised by a bulimia in the production and exchange of images of near and far places, deeply altering the very perception of distance, redefining spatial practices, and, in the long run, modifying the nature of landscapes themselves. But what digital technology shows with singular clarity, with its extraordinary capacity to transform and redefine landscapes even materially, is actually a general characteristic of landscape as such: its essentially mediated nature. Every medium in which a representation of the landscape is realised contributes to create its experience and perception as well as the very organisation of its elements and its formal character. The forms of mediation in which landscapes are communicated and constructed range from maps to paintings, from land art to place-based performances, from photography to cinema, from novel descriptions to TV series scripts,

from images sourced from the tourism industry to those of documentaries and television. The mediation of the image is each time properly artistic, as in the case of land art, or instead linked to obvious marketing needs, as in the case of tourist brochures. In some cases, the mimetic function prevails over the communicative one in order to better serve knowledge objectives, as is the case with maps, but also in certain ways of considering landscape drawing (think, for example, of Alexander von Humboldt's use of drawings as tools to which the analytical description of landscape elements is associated); in other cases, the communicative function prevails over the descriptive/mimetic one, as demonstrated by media such as postcards or social images. Furthermore, mediation can serve a form of "augmentation of being" (Gadamer 1960), insofar as it intensifies the aura of a landscape and enables it to highlight features removed or neglected by the common gaze (think of the effect that certain songs dedicated to a landscape or place can have, such as John Denver's West Virginia), or it can represent a stylisation (as in the case of maps), a trivialisation (as in the case of advertisements) or even an evaporation (such as the Orange County, landscape of *simulacra*, in Baudrillard 1981).

This issue of *Aesthetica* Preprint on "Landscape and Media" investigates the mediations in which landscape is constituted, addressing the question of the mediality of landscape from different perspectives. Mediality is a general category that is implemented differently depending on the media considered. In our focus, we start with painting, which in Giulia Giambrone's article is investigated in relation to its contemporary developments. Zoltán Somhegyi's article discusses the works of several artists, ranging from painting to photography, with an approach aimed at showing, among other things, the semantic and symbolic potential of the natural elements of which the landscape is made up. Elena Romagnoli's text focuses on photography: the author addresses the way in which the practices linked to photography, despite the visual character of the medium, contribute to making landscape a performative dimension of the human spatial experience, thus overcoming the widespread association in literature between the concept of landscape and the aesthetics of the picturesque. Fabrizio Gitto's text also deals with photography, focusing on the case study of Tuscan landscape illustration in the 1920s. We then move on to cinema with a contribution by Manlio Piva and Michael Guarneri on the Italian landscape in silent films, presenting the first results of the interdisciplinary project RevIS (Revisual-

izing Italian Silentscapes 1896-1922). Madalina Diaconu's contribution analyses a landscape medium of great interest despite being less frequently discussed in the literature: the miniature, of which the author offers a broad and articulate overview. Tommaso Morawski's article, instead, deals with the transformations of landscape representation resulting from satellite vision and astronomical space. The articles by Alberto L. Siani, Valeria D'Agata and Rita Messori offer focused analyses of the way different artists conceive as well as *make* the landscape. Siani's article considers Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, with his holistic vision of experience, art, science, and action, embodied in his poetic and scientific works as well as in his theory of colours; in Rita Messori's article, philosophically inspired to the phenomenological orientation of the French school in particular, the reference is to Pierre Tal-Coat; in D'Agata's article, in which the relationship between ethics and aesthetics comes to the fore, the focus is on César Manrique. The relationship between aesthetics and ethics is also central in Katia Botta's text, which focuses mainly on a specific place – the Matterhorn mountain – working on a plurality of representations and media, within the framework of the extraordinary and “modern” relevance of the mountain as a geographical form. Finally, Valeria Maggiore's article is surely relevant from the point of view of environmental ethics. By focusing on Gilles Clément's theoretical proposal, it actually proposes an integration of the concept of landscape in contemporary environmental studies and philosophy of nature.

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