Chapter 8
CulturalNature Arga#2

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ABSTRACT

CulturalNature Arga#2 is an interactive audio-visual installation intended to explore the concept of landscape as a verb (to landscape) questioning and reflecting about the semiotic discourses associated with this concept. The landscape as something natural, static, peaceful, silent, etc. is a semiotic discourse with roots in a past related with the representation of a point of view, not only perceptual but also conceptual, ideological. These representations informed the visual culture leading to a particular discourse. The installation proposes a reflexion about the way different elements associated with a particular territory shape this territory's landscape, giving it a dynamic existence, a product of cultural activity.

INTRODUCTION

Landscape is an extremely complex and subjective concept, being approached from a wide range of perspectives. Many disciplines, like geography, anthropology, history, architecture, ecology, art, design, etc., study and reflect about landscape. Through their studies we find different definitions and perspectives related to what we understand as landscape. The concept is polysemic and, according to Ribeiro (2007, p.13), some scholars put in question its conceptual value precisely because it's associated to a wide range of interpretations and subjectivity.

Historically, the landscape genre, in occidental art, emerges in the fifteenth century related with the representation of a point of view. These representations are strongly connected with a particular ideological or romantic view of the world, directly related with a particular visual culture. Connected with painting and drawing, the artistic landscape genre, in the nineteenth century started to decline dramatically, particularly with the upcoming of the emerging vanguards. Although there are authors that talk

about the death of this genre associated with the death of the painting, the landscape never really stopped being researched and reflected by the artistic community.

Today we see several artworks that explore the landscape concept. From representing a piece of territory, figuratively, on a canvas with paint, we went to representing the landscape in terms of media, artefact, system, ideology, place, static, power, sublime, picturesque, idyllic, decline, identity, etc.

The landscape genre is intimately related with the sublime, where it is objectified by nature - the most scary aspects can be appreciated by creating a distance -, and the picturesque, where subjectivity emerges through art - a romantic and subjective image. According to Fowkes (2010), contemporaneity shakes the picturesque by portraying landscapes that do not correspond to the conventional categories of this or calling the attention, deliberately, to these particular categories.

I would like to bring here some examples of artworks that explore the concept in other terms besides the figurative representation. The first one is Tree (2004), by Simon Heijdens Studio (Figures 1). According to the authors, "Ripples on a puddle of water, footsteps in the sand and slowly gathering grime. Natural processes are existent though becoming rare in our increasingly planned surrounding. While the trees on the streets are no longer nature but carefully controlled and managed, the wind that is moving its branches still is. An installation that traces and amplifies the leftovers of nature in the urban surrounding." (2004)

Eight meters tall computer synthesised trees were projected in several buildings. These trees balance with more or less velocity according to the intensity of the wind presented in that specific moment.

These trees appear full of leafs. But, when someone passes, one leaf falls on the floor. This process creates a pile of leafs that, with time, illuminate the place as a consequence of its increased projected light. These leafs projected on the floor move in reaction to the individual that passes walking.

Figure 1. Simon Heijdens, Installation tree (© 2004, images collected from the author's website. Used with permission)

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