

## Chapter 35

# 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 enformed 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. Like J.T.W. Mitchell, here, the landscape is seen "...as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed." (1994)*

### 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 polissemic and, according to Ribeiro (2007:13), 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

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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.

CulturalNature Arga#2 explores the landscape concept as a product of social and cultural practices pointing to the way particular aspects of the territory share and form the landscape. The conceptual point of view comes from the social semiotic theory, in particular, the discourse theory from Theo Van Leeuwen (2005). It is possible to identify a semiotic discourse, related to social and cultural practices, that contribute to the development of a particular visual culture regarding the landscape. Through the creative process associated with the installation and through the installation in itself, we intend to reflect about this phenomenon of the landscape as a product of social and cultural practices.

## **THE LANDSCAPE AND ITS SEMIOTIC DISCOURSE**

Landscape, as a view, refers to a specific point of view over a scenery or specific area of a territory with particular natural and/or cultural characteristics. As a noun, it's related to a representation of this point of view. As a discipline, it refers to a particular field of disciplines like painting and photography, which deals with these representations. As a verb, it refers to the act of shaping a territory with the intent of making him more pleasant and useful. (Lorch, 2002)

The landscape is a social phenomenon that can be perceived according many different points of view and characteristics. It consists and it's formed by natural and cultural forces that can be studied and identified by a wide range of disciplines. In the context of the audio-visual interactive installation CulturalNature Arga#2, the landscape is thought as a verb (to landscape), as a social practice that acts over and transforms a particular space.

J.T.W. Mitchell (1994) identifies two ways of approaching the concept of landscape –as a representation and perception– and adds a third one –as a media in its own. The landscape, when it refers to a representation, on one side, may assume itself as a progressive movement in the direction of a purification of the visual field and, on the other side, as perception, it can assume itself as a process of contemplation and naturalisation of cultural and social constructions. Besides these two, and in a postmodern perspective, Mitchell refers to landscape as an allegory to the social and psychological that needs to be deconstructed, underlining that the landscape is a media on its own that carries messages related with the space, the subject and the activities.

An important concept to bring here is the notion of semiotic resource. According to Leeuwen (2005), semiotic resources are the actions and/or artefacts used to communicate, whether they are produced physiological (vocal system, muscles to create facial expressions or gestures, etc.) or technological (pen, ink and paper; hardware and software, with tissues, scissors and sewing machines, etc.). A semiotic resource is whatever it's used — or can be used — by the subject to communicate, to produce meaning, in a specific time and place. It's like a raw material that, through its manipulation associated with some communicative intention, and through a process of interpretation with the reader, inside a specific context with particular codes, rules and conventions, acquires meaning. However, it's important to underline that

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