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Reclaiming Landscape

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Reclaiming Landscape

At the end we always find a reason, a justification for all the things that have been constructed, even the worse ones, just because they exist [...] after a while everything becomes part of the landscape. It's there. It exists. People don't even remember how it had been before. It doesn't take much to destroy beauty [...] we should remind people what is beauty. Help them recognize it, defend it. Yes, beauty. Everything starts from there.¹

(Peppino Impastato, in the movie *I cento passi*)

The concept of landscape has been the focus of many theoretical and political debates during the last decades² and is bound to play a dominant role in the future, as industrialized societies face more and more difficult environmental challenges.³ Landscape is no longer considered an exclusive domain to be enjoyed by few individuals endowed with a superior aesthetic sensibility, as the notion that we inherited from Romanticism seems to imply.⁴ One of the most compelling calls for a new definition of landscape came from John Brinkerhoff Jackson, one of the main cultural geographers of the last century.⁵ In his seminal study, entitled *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, Jackson challenged the traditional description created by art historians that we still find in our dictionaries, which define landscape as a portion of land that the eye can comprehend at a glance.⁶ He put forth the thesis that “a landscape is not a natural feature of the environment, but a *synthetic* space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land, functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community” (9). In my essay, I would like to show that recent critical thought, both in Italy and elsewhere, has been

¹ All translations in this essay are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

² See, for a general introduction Dagognet. In Italy, the founding text is Assunto.

³ On the challenges posed by urban and suburban sprawl see Berque. For an analysis of the Italian situation, Turri.

⁴ In her essay “Il paesaggio come rappresentazione,” Bonesio writes that this elitist vision of landscape “seems to grant intellectuals and artists the exclusive privilege of perceiving landscape [...] while those who inhabit the territory are aesthetically insensitive to its beauty” (*Paesaggio, identità e comunità* 27).

⁵ Jackson, who taught at Harvard, Berkeley, and many other universities, was the founder of the journal *Landscape*, which revolutionized the field of Landscape Studies.

⁶ One of the fundamental texts on the notion of landscape in art is by Clark.

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moving from an elitist definition of landscape to a more democratic one. I will start by examining the work of some of the most important contributors to the field and then I will show how Italian critical discourse intertwines with the ongoing global debate on landscape. Given the interdisciplinary character of the concept, I will draw from a number of disciplines, including philosophy, geography, art history, literature, and urban studies.

The "constructed" nature of landscape is nowhere more palpable than in Italy, a country where virtually every inch of the land has been transformed to suit the needs of the inhabitants. Landscape may be seen as a palimpsest, where one only has to scratch the surface in order to detect the signs left by previous generations, often concealed under the deceiving naturalness of the scenery. The etymology of "landscape," in both the Anglo-Saxon and Romance languages, points to the presence of a human settlement. The Italian word "paesaggio" derives from the Latin "pagus," the traditional stone planted into the soil to mark a border and identify a community with its own set of norms and cultural memories.⁷ Landscape also delimits the physical site where collective and individual memories are inscribed: it is difficult to realize the extent to which the places we inhabit contribute to shape our personal identities. Eugenio Montale expressed the profound sense of belonging to one's place in a famous prose poem entitled "Dov'era il tennis," in the volume *La bufera e altro*: "It is strange to think that each one of us has a *paese* like this one, even though it may be very different, that will become *his* landscape, unchangeable" (223).

Landscape and memory are inextricably connected to one another, as Simon Schama's study with the same name convincingly showed.⁸ However, in an important work entitled *Landscape and Power*, W. J. T. Mitchell has argued that landscape may also become "a place of amnesia and erasure, a strategic place for burying the past and veiling history with natural beauty" (262). Mitchell's target is the traditional concept of landscape that has dominated the discourse of art history for several centuries, the same against which Jackson was reacting when he called for a new definition. For Mitchell, "[l]andscape is something to be seen, not touched. It is an abstraction from place and a reification of space. [...] A landscape, then, turns site into sight, place and space into a visual image" (265). Mitchell's provocative critique of landscape, which he sees as an expression of European imperialism,⁹ is based on the premise that it is generally considered a visual phenomenon, a representation of nature from a detached perspective that may grant the viewer a certain degree of control over the "scenery" he contemplates.

⁷ For a discussion of the Indo-European roots of the term "landscape," see Jackson 5-8.

⁸ See Schama on the relationship between memory and landscape.

⁹ See his intriguing essay entitled "Imperial Landscape," published in *Landscape and Power*. I am quoting from the second, expanded edition, with new essays by Mitchell, Edward Said, and others.

Renaissance Italy and the Birth of Landscape

The Flemish term *Lantschap* emerged during the second half of the fifteenth century in Flanders and achieved a fully developed conceptualization in the city-states of Northern Italy.¹⁰ Denis Cosgrove investigated the renaissance origins of the "idea of landscape" in a book entitled *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*.¹¹ For Cosgrove, landscape is an ideological construction, a "social product, the consequence of a collective transformation of nature" (14). When we speak of landscape beauty we almost always take the point of view of an observer situated outside or close to the margins of the place that is being contemplated. Cosgrove, on the contrary, distinguishes between the external, individual observer and the insider-participant. Whereas for the insider "the external world is unmediated by aesthetic conventions and the collective existed with the individual," the outside observer "is offered an important element of personal *control* over the external world" (19, 18). The principles of mathematical perspective developed by Italian Renaissance intellectuals such as Leon Battista Alberti and Filippo Brunelleschi allowed the viewer, ideally embodied by the powerful aristocrat at ease in his villa or *palazzo*, to exercise a visual control of space: "Reality was frozen at a specific moment, removed from the flux of time and change, and rendered the property of the observer" (22). The experience of the insider, who inhabits and works in the landscape, was left out or marginalized: in a landscape painting, workers may only be viewed from a distance, but cannot be too dominant, or the art work would no longer fit the traditional definition. The elements to be included in the composition are just as important as those that are omitted. As Jackson remarks, both Renaissance painters and eighteenth-century landscape gardeners "took pains to produce a 'picturesque' stylized landscape, leaving out the muddy roads, the plowed fields, the squalid villages of the real countryside and including certain agreeable natural features: brooks and groves of trees and smooth expanses of grass" (3).

In Italy, the transition toward an increasingly aestheticized idea of landscape in which human figures are either absent or marginalized coincided with the decline of the Italian *comuni* and the emergence of the *signorie*. Cosgrove illustrates this shift through the juxtaposed analysis of two exemplary Italian art works: *L'allegoria del buon governo*, a fresco realized by Ambrogio Lorenzetti for the *Palazzo Civico* in Siena, and Pinturicchio's *Funerale di San Bernardino*. In Lorenzetti's fresco the city is depicted as a living organism, lively and full of human activities. Even though a clear hierarchical distinction is drawn between those who live within the city walls and the peasants who are portrayed as either working in the fields or bringing their "offerings" to the city

¹⁰ See the chapter "La nascita del paesaggio" in Bertone 24-29.

¹¹ Cosgrove held the Alexander von Humboldt Chair of Geography at UCLA. He was one of the foremost geographers of the last century.

dwellers, it is difficult to distinguish between aristocrats and bourgeois: they are “integrated into a pictorial unity of colour and movement by activity across the picture surface rather than by the formal composition of picture space or architecture” (Cosgrove 91). On the contrary, Pinturicchio’s painting displays a strictly mathematical compositional order in which both the landscape and its inhabitants appear frozen in their monumental beauty. “Their gestures are dramatic and self-conscious, not the movements and activities of humans going about their civic affairs but expressions of human dignity and aristocratic poise” (92). Lorenzetti paints a landscape still “in progress,” whereas in Pinturicchio’s painting even the smallest elements of society have a pre-assigned role from which they cannot escape. The result is a theatrical *mise en scène* where the actors on stage have been transformed into statues. This is the static — and statuesque — notion of landscape that we inherited from the Renaissance: something to be contemplated from a distance, with a mix of awe and reverence. Similar to a sacred icon or a precious work of art, landscape is often described as a hieroglyph endowed with its aura — a *Stimmung*, as Georg Simmel called it — which is not merely the creation of the human imagination, but seems to originate from the object itself. It is necessary to look at the philosophical foundations of the concept if we want to reclaim landscape for our usage.

The Ambivalent Nature of Landscape

Published for the first time in 1913, Simmel’s *Philosophy of Landscape* set the path for most successive theorizations. Simmel starts from the premise that for “there to be a landscape, our consciousness has to acquire a wholeness, a unity, over and above its component elements, without being tied to its specificity or mechanistically composed of them” (21). Although landscape is a fragment that has been torn away and separated by the “infinite interconnected of objects” and “the uninterrupted creation and destruction of forms” that constitute nature, nevertheless it is “permeated by an opaque awareness of this infinite interconnectedness” (21, 22). The paradoxical nature of landscape, a fragment that strives towards wholeness, reflects the tragedy of modern human consciousness which, after being separated from the wholeness of nature, is forever trying to recover it. “It cannot be denied, however, that landscape comes into being in a process whereby the life that pulsates within our perceptions and emotions tears itself away from the homogeneity of nature” (23).

The sense of wholeness that characterizes landscape and endows it with its uniqueness is what Simmel calls *Stimmung*, a term often translated as “mood,” or “humor,” but very difficult to express in another language: “The most important carrier of this unity may well be the ‘mood’, as we call it, of a landscape [...] the mood of a landscape permeates all its separate components, frequently without being attributable to any one of them” (25). In a way that even Simmel finds difficult to define, each component contributes to the creation of landscape, “but a mood prevails that is neither external to these

constituents, nor is it composed of them” (Simmel 26). Simmel shows himself to be well aware of the paradoxical ambivalence of landscape when he wonders: “[T]o what extent can the mood of a landscape be located within it, objectively, given that it is a mental state, and can thus reside only in the emotional reflexes of the beholder and not in unconscious external objects?” (27).

The ambivalent nature of landscape has been underlined by most theoreticians. In the opening paragraphs of his recent book, entitled *Paesaggio e letteratura*, Michael Jakob writes: “The mode of being of landscape, situated on the threshold between subjectivity and objectivity, freedom and necessity, is similar to the work of art” (7).¹² This inescapable ambivalence led most geographers, concerned with giving their discipline an indisputable scientific foundation, to dismiss the category of landscape.¹³ Philosophers, on the other hand, often interpreted landscape as one of the central dilemmas of modernity. For Joachim Ritter, author of a seminal essay published in 1963, landscape is one of the consequences of the progressive distancing of modern human societies from the wholeness of nature, which we may be apprehend only as an aesthetic phenomenon:

Landscape is nature that reveals itself aesthetically to whoever observes and contemplates it with sentiment. The fields outside the city, the river that represents either a boundary or an obstacle to be overcome by a bridge, the mountains and the prairies of the shepherds (or gold miners) cannot be considered landscape. They become such only when a person turns to them without any practical concern, comprehending and enjoying them freely, to be within nature as a human being.

(47)

Whereas post-Cartesian science puts an end to the wholeness of nature in order to control and dominate it, “aesthetic imagination takes upon itself the task of keeping the whole nature alive for the spirit” (53). For Ritter there is no possible return to an uncontaminated nature, because its domination is the precondition for our freedom. The German philosopher analyzes Friedrich Schiller’s famous poem “The Walk,” written in 1795 in response to Rousseau, to show that “the loss of uncontaminated nature is instead the precondition for our freedom.” (59). Landscape thus becomes a sort of aesthetic compensation for the loss of communication between human beings and nature: “The aesthetic recovery and the representation of nature as landscape have the positive function of maintaining the communication with nature open, by giving it the opportunity of expressing itself with words and through the gaze” (60).

¹² Jakob also authored *Il paesaggio* and *Paesaggio e tempo*, both published in 2009.

¹³ One notable Italian exception is Quaini. See especially his *L'ombra del paesaggio*, to which we will return in the last part of the essay.

Rosario Assunto's Philosophy of Landscape

For Ritter landscape is the domain of the modern alienated individual who feels the need to go out into nature in order to retrieve what can no longer be experienced in the city (*hinausgehen* is the term used by the author). Luisa Bonesio writes that in Ritter "natural beauty is recovered as a residual dimension of a nostalgic lament and mnemonic ("rammemorante") longing, following strategies that go from romantic transfigurations to the contemporary theme parks" (21). In other words, the German philosopher seems to reconfirm the traditionally elitist vision of landscape that we have outlined at the beginning of the essay. In *Il paesaggio e l'estetica*, published for the first time in 1973 and largely ignored by contemporary critics, Rosario Assunto tried to liberate the philosophy of landscape from the aesthetic realm in which Ritter had enclosed it by showing its importance for a society that was entirely absorbed by the process of modernization. Assunto argued that one of the main problems with contemporary thought is its inability to distinguish between "space" and "landscape." Many modern architects and urban planners considered Italian landscape as if it were abstract space, destroying "the landscape of memory and imagination to transform it into pure and simple geometric *space*" (Assunto 17).. Thus, the Po valley is no longer "the lovely plain that from Vercelli to Marcabò declines," as Dante described it in *Inferno* 28, 74-75, but a flat, empty space that may be occupied and destroyed without any concern for the cultures that had produced it. For Assunto, who quotes and discusses at length Ritter's work in his book, landscape is not only an aesthetic category, but a site where individual and collective memories are inscribed: by destroying it, we may deprive ourselves of our identities. In Assunto's writing there is a sense of urgency that derives from the acute awareness of the crimes that were being perpetrated against landscape during the years of the economic boom. Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to protest and denounce the many environmental scandals carried out in the name of progress, unless we deconstruct at the theoretical level the identification between space and landscape. For Assunto, landscape is an "open finiteness," a place where space opens itself up to the infinite: "[...] it does not *represent* the infinite (symbolically or in an illusionistic fashion), but it opens up to the infinite in its own finiteness; it embodies a *presence*, not a *representation*, of the infinite in finiteness" (10). Therefore, landscape is defined as the place where "infinite and finiteness are joined together and merge into each other" (21). The merging point is the horizon, as in Leopardi's poem "L'infinito" that Assunto glosses with great intelligence, showing the merging of the limited human space with the infinite space that the horizon unveils in front of our imagination: "'L'infinito' interests us because it shows, by expressing it poetically, the essence of landscape as the presence of infinity within the finiteness of a limited space" (12). Thus, we may say that the line of the horizon

acts both as a closure, without which there would be no landscape,¹⁴ and as an invitation to extend ourselves toward an infinite space that is beyond our comprehension and never ceases to attract us.¹⁵ Assunto's concept of landscape echoes what Simmel said about the infinite presence of nature being reflected in landscape: "[...] torn away and standing on its own, a landscape is permeated by an opaque awareness of the infinite interconnectedness" (Simmel 22).

What distinguishes Assunto's approach from philosophers such as Ritter and Simmel is the intention to construct a theory that may serve as guidance in setting new policies that may put an end to the ongoing destruction of landscape. In the chapter entitled "Città e paesaggio" the Sicilian theoretician shows how the irruption of modernization has contributed to excluding the surrounding landscape from the city. Assunto cites a passage from a letter that Nietzsche wrote to Carl Fuchs, in which he describes Turin as "the city for my heart," where the air is so pure and the roads so well designed that by looking at the Alps covered with snow from the city center, one has the impression of being transported up to the top of the mountains. The "speculazione edilizia" that spread throughout Italy after WWII, brilliantly illustrated by Italo Calvino in his homonymous novel, and the pollution caused by industrialization put an end to the interconnectedness between the city and the surrounding landscape, enclosing the urban areas onto themselves and transforming historical places into empty homogenous spaces. While commenting on a photograph of a series of buildings erected during the economic boom in Rome, Assunto writes: "[...] here we are not in a *place*, but a pure and simple space, definable only in terms of volume and surface" (56).

The separation of the city from its surroundings countryside, often through the construction of massive and terrifying housing projects that surround and suffocate virtually every large Italian urban area, has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond the realm of aesthetics. Luisa Bonesio writes that Assunto was one of the first Italian philosophers who tried to show the political ramifications of the concept of landscape: "Assunto transported the concept of landscape from the realm of perception and representation as an aesthetic phenomenon to the living place of a community; therefore it becomes a place of our life and not a subjective image and a sentimental projection. It is a complex substance and the warrantor of our memory and identity" (Bonesio 105).¹⁶ In other words, Assunto contributed to shifting the discourse on landscape from the

¹⁴ This is what Assunto calls "the requirement of limitedness, without which space does not become, aesthetically, landscape" (14).

¹⁵ Another poetic example of this tension toward the infinite is Montale's suite "Mediterraneo" in *Ossi di seppia*, where the poetic persona is constantly on the threshold between the vastness of the sea and the *terraferma* (page ref.53-61).

¹⁶ The title of the chapter we are quoting from is entitled "Un secolo ostile al paesaggio" and the section devoted to Assunto, "Una voce fuori dal coro."

realm of aesthetics to ethics and politics while grounding his critique on solid philosophical foundations. Bonesio remarks that the concept of landscape that he developed “is the opposite of the ‘beautiful scenery’ that we see in postcards. It is the identity — definitely not static — of a complex cultural and memorial imprint that we may use to direct our future projects” (Bonesio 104).

From the Opaque: Massimo Quaini and Italo Calvino's Other Liguria

One of the most intriguing Italian theoreticians of landscape is Massimo Quaini, a cultural geographer and historian of cartography who seeks to establish a productive dialogue with literature and the visual arts. In *L'ombra del paesaggio*, Quaini admits that landscape is an inadequate category to read our environment and territory in a scientific fashion. Instead, landscape interests him as a “receptacle of myths, dreams and emotions; it is an accumulator of metaphors that may help us explain the contradictions of our time” (12).¹⁷ The main focus of Quaini's reflections is his own native region of Liguria, that he considers as a “sample region” or “laboratory” through which one may see, as through a magnifying glass, the main contradictions that affect “il paese-Italia,”¹⁸ whose traditional landscapes and identities are increasingly threatened by the forces of globalization. The Italian peninsula is often described as a sort of natural bridge between the thriving economies of Northern Europe and the “underdeveloped” countries of Northern Africa and the Middle East. Fernand Braudel's conceptualization of the Mediterranean basin as a “space-movement” where ideas, goods, and cultures intermingled for many centuries is especially true for Italy and its maritime republics, such as Genoa and Venice.¹⁹ This interpretation has contributed to creating the myth of Liguria as a region forever projected toward the sea, thus forgetting the landscape of its interior: “[...] the invisibility of landscape is the paradoxical consequence of an excess of visibility of its urban and coastal profile, overlooking the sea” (“La Liguria invisibile” 43-44). Since the time of Petrarch, travelers have concentrated their attention almost exclusively on the coastline, generally perceived while sailing along the shore: “[...] everywhere you turn, you will see beautiful valleys, flowing creeks, pleasant hills covered with thick vegetation, golden houses scattered along the shore, and you will be surprised that such a city does not succumb to the beauty of its surroundings” (qtd. in “La Liguria invisibile” 44). This is the beautiful

¹⁷ The volume represents an important moment in an ongoing reflection on landscape that Quaini began in 1973 with *Per la storia del paesaggio agrario in Liguria*, followed by many other books and articles, among which we should mention the essay “La Liguria invisibile.”

¹⁸ Quaini quotes a passage from Mario Soldati's work *Regione regina*, originally published in 1967: “Genoa and Liguria are the city and the region that, by themselves, represent our country more faithfully” (*L'ombra del paesaggio* 284).

¹⁹ “The Mediterranean is, with all the emphasis of the term, a space-movement” (66).

“facade” that reflects the Renaissance concept of landscape to be found in the postcards and illustrated brochures of the travel industry. This mesmerizing landscape reminds us of the “invisible city” of Moriana, described by Italo Calvino: “From one part to the other, the city seems to continue, in perspective, multiplying its repertory of images: but instead it has no thickness, it consists only of a face and an obverse, like a sheet of paper, with a figure on either side, which can neither be separated nor look at each other” (*Invisible Cities* 105).. Behind its “alabaster gates transparent in the sunlight, its coral columns supporting pediments encrusted with serpentine, its villas all of glass like aquariums where the shadow of dancing girls with silvery scales swims beneath the medusa-shaped chandeliers,” the landscape conceals a dark side that no one wants to perceive, littered with all kinds of debris. Calvino’s reference to the myth of Medusa, the goddess who transforms onlookers into stone, suggests that the enchanting beauty of landscape tends to “freeze” life, transforming “sites into pure sights,” as Mitchell would have it (265).

“What we need to reinvent today,” Quaini writes, “is a scenography of landscape with actors, and not merely with spectators” (*L’ombra del paesaggio* 17). He is calling for a re-conceptualization of landscape similar to the one proposed by Cosgrove when he distinguished between the “external observer” and “insider” (19). In order to bring about this shift in perspective, Quaini follows the path indicated by Calvino, who grew up like him in the western part of the Italian Riviera.²⁰ One of Quaini’s main references is the short story “From the Opaque,” where Calvino states that he writes “from the depth of the opaque” (*The Road to San Giovanni* 110).. The “opaque” is defined by the Ligurian author as that part of landscape that the sunshine almost never reaches, the opposite of the sunny side. In the “Presentation” to his first novel, *The Path to Nests of Spiders*, written almost twenty years after the publication of the novel itself in 1946, Calvino claims that one of his main achievements in his first book was the creation of a new landscape. He writes: “[...] the landscape was something of jealously mine (...) a landscape that no one had ever really put on paper” (xviii). Calvino went beyond the stereotypical images of the Italian Riviera by showing what we may call, using Jackson’s terminology, the “vernacular landscape” of Liguria²¹). Through the experience of the Resistance, in which he took an active part between 1943 and 1945, Calvino became aware

²⁰ Quaini writes: “I consider myself a copyist, not a writer, since I am aware that the book on Ligurian landscape has already been written: by the many generations of people who have strenuously built it and by the people who have described and positioned it” (*L’ombra del paesaggio* 28-29).

²¹ “A vernacular culture would imply a way of life ruled by tradition and custom, entirely remote from the larger world of politics and law; a way of life where identity derived not from permanent possession of land but from membership in a group or super-family.” (149)

for the first time of a world that until then had remained in the shadow, hidden by the glamorous images of international tourism and modernization that played a major role in the demagoguery of fascism. Fighting as a partisan side by side with the peasants, he discovered the dark, opaque side of the Ligurian landscape and, consequently, his position changed from “external observer” to “participant.” Landscape was no longer the picturesque scenery created — as we have seen — by eighteenth-century gardeners, but a collective, dynamic space, “functioning and evolving,” as Jackson would have it, “not according to natural laws but to serve a community” (5).

The region of Liguria, with one side oriented toward the Mediterranean Sea and the other oriented toward Northern Europe, is the ideal milieu to study the ambivalence of Italian landscape. Similar to the two-faced god Janus, who is one of the emblems of the city of Genoa, the region is geographically and culturally split into opposing sides. The part facing the sea was always open to commerce, explorations, and cultural exchanges with the Mediterranean basin and beyond. The mountainous part of the region, which constitutes the majority of the territory, represents the dark, vernacular side. Its cultural identity rests on the delicate and precarious balance between these two opposing parts. In *L'ombra del paesaggio* Massimo Quaini evokes the mythical giant Antaeus, son of Poseidon and Gaia, to illustrate the conflict between the vernacular and the “global” components of landscape. Antaeus is a giant who rests with his head in the sea and the body solidly planted in the land.²² he is invincible as long as he remains in contact with the *terraferma*. Heracles, the greatest of Greek heroes, manages to strangle Antaeus by lifting him into the air (150). For Quaini, Heracles represents the forces of globalization that destroy the vernacular landscape, disrupt the lives of the local communities, and project them toward an uncertain “oceanic drift.” Antaeus becomes an allegory for Liguria and the entire Italian peninsula, which in order to become a major player in the “liquid” global economy, is inflicting more and more severe damages to its landscape and the cultures that have produced it. Quaini appropriates the idea of “oceanic drift” from Franco Cassano who claims that Italian civilization, born on the Mediterranean shores, in order to become “first European and then global has abandoned the balance of the thought situated between land and sea; it lost the Mediterranean harmony, in order to become more oceanic” (Quaini *L'ombra del paesaggio* 52).

Calvino portrayed the obscure, humble inhabitants of vernacular Liguria in a little-known essay he wrote for the journal *Il Politecnico* in 1945, entitled “Liguria magra e ossuta” (“Skinny and Bony Liguria”), which begins with these

²² The comparison was probably inspired by these beautiful lines, written by Anna Maria Ortese: “Liguria (...) is intact and silent like a monster of the abysses who rests with its head on the continent and its back covered with seaweeds; it is anchored somewhere and cannot move. Its breathing is melancholic” (qtd. in Bertone 238).

words: "Behind the Liguria of tourist posters, behind the Liguria of grand hotels, of casinos, of international tourism, there is the Liguria of peasants, forgotten and unknown" (*Saggi* II, 2363).²³ As an adolescent, Calvino was more attracted by the dazzling spectacle he saw from the balcony of his house, facing the Mediterranean Sea: "[...] those lights at night were not only the streets and the lights of our small, secluded city, but *the* city, a glimpse of all possible cities, and its port already was the port of all the continents" (*San Giovanni* 8) In *L'ombra del paesaggio*, Quaini distinguishes between two different types of space: he calls the first one the space of fluxes ("lo spazio dei flussi") — a deterritorialized, abstract space, that has almost no connections with the local culture and its landscape. It is the space of financial transactions, multinational corporations and modern technological warfare. The second is the space of places ("lo spazio dei luoghi") and represents the space of human relations, social cohesion, and guerrilla warfare, the same one experienced by Calvino during WWII when he joined the partisans who were fighting in the mountains above Sanremo (165). Calvino's father, who was by profession an agronomist, was more attached to what Quaini calls the space of places and saw the world from a completely different perspective: "It was from here up that everything began, and the other part of the world below the house was a mere appendix, necessary sometimes to take care of business, but alien and meaningless, to be crossed quickly, with long strides, almost as if he were running away from it" (*San Giovanni* 7-9). Calvino's father struggled to realize a utopian balance that Quaini, using Franco Cassano's terminology,²⁴ calls "the return to Mediterranean measure" (*L'ombra del paesaggio* 244). An ideal landscape, Jackson argued in the closing paragraphs of his *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, is "not a static utopia dedicated to ecological or social or religious principles," but an environment where permanence and change, global tendencies and local traditions have reached a balance (148).

Landscape between Local and Global

One of the most interesting features displayed by the authors who write about landscape is the desire — or necessity — of anchoring their theories to a specific place. Massimo Quaini and Italo Calvino's outlook point is the Italian Riviera, which becomes a metaphor to illustrate the phenomena associated with modernization and deterritorialization. Luisa Bonesio, Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Pavia, who has written many important essays on landscape, takes as a point of departure her mountains of the Valtellina.²⁵ Landscape is for

²³ Unfortunately, the photographs that complemented the articles published in *Il Politecnico* were not included in the Mondadori edition.

²⁴ On the notion of "misura" see Franco Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano*, xxvii-xxxvi.

²⁵ In addition to *Paesaggio, identità e comunità tra glogale e locale*, from which we are quoting, other books that we found most stimulating are: *Geofilosofia del paesaggio* and

her the place we inhabit and for which we must care: not merely the object of our subjective perceptions, but a place endowed with characteristics that shape its own peculiar identity. The process of identity formation that connects an individual or a community to a certain place should not be thought of in terms of origins. On the contrary, under the influence of global, hegemonic ideologies, natives may become detached from the *genius loci* that characterize a landscape and even contribute to its destruction. Bonesio writes that a “place does not exist in itself, but only if it is recognized by the community that inhabits it” (*Paesaggio, identità* 201). A place is not a place of origins but a destination, “a space of meaning that must be reconquered” through a negotiation with the hegemonic forces that tend to erase its physiognomy through homologation (201). Thus, the sense of belonging that we feel toward a certain place is the result of an “elective” process, much more inclusive toward migrant and nomadic subjects than the traditional one based on “race” or “ethnicity” often advocated by reactionary and xenophobic political parties in Italy and elsewhere. Bonesio calls it a “project of elective belonging to a place through the reactivation of memory and its transmission, which is not concerned with registry and professional status” (201).

What distinguishes the concept of landscape from “place” is its strategic positioning, situated on the threshold between local and global and constantly mediating between them. As Bonesio writes, “landscape must be thought of as a moment of a much broader reflection on global and local levels” (208). The global must respect and understand the peculiar features of local cultures, without erasing their differences. The local, on the other hand, needs to acquire a wider perspective: “[...] the local may fall back into ‘abstract localism’ without its global counterpart” (208). I would argue that the concept of landscape embodies an immanent critique of both local and global. As Assunto demonstrated, landscape represents the instance in which a place opens itself up to a larger, infinite horizon, without losing its own peculiar identity. It is where “limitedness and infinite are joined together and merge into each other” (208). Like the mythical giant Antaeus evoked by Massimo Quaini, the strength of landscape resides in its “liminality,” or “betweenness,” forever oscillating on the edge between land and sea, local and global. It is difficult to disagree with Bonesio when she writes that “we must find a compromise between the two opposing forces: on the one hand the nomadic atopia represented by the neutral and homologated spaces of the internet and on the other the identity connected to stable places and familiar horizons” (213).

In order to achieve this balance a radical shift of direction is necessary, aimed at empowering local communities and restoring virtuous relationships between cities and their surrounding territories. The model proposed by Alberto

Magnaghi in *The Urban Village: A Charter for Democracy and Self-Sustainable Development*, recently translated into English with an introduction by Edward Goldsmith, makes a series of concrete proposals, moving beyond theory and engaging municipalities both in Italy and elsewhere.²⁶ Magnaghi is Professor of Land Use Planning at the University of Florence and founder of the “territorialist school,” an approach that intends to create a truly participatory democracy, very different from the representative democracy as we know it today, where powerful industrial lobbies “view voters as little more than a passive assembly of consumers, a mass audience of potential buyers” (Magnaghi xiii). Magnaghi’s “New Municipium,” envisioned in the Charter presented at the Porto Alegre World Social Forum in 2002, constitutes the foundation for a global network of independent and self-sustainable municipalities.²⁷ He describes the project as a “bottom-up globalization,” which starts from the local communities that late capitalism has destroyed:

Here deterritorialization does not take the form — as in the past — of a phase of transition towards a new territoriality [...]. This time it has been determined by an intrinsically de-territorialized socio-economic system, organized in an increasingly artificial atemporal abstract space destructuring (because of the form and speed of the process) the historical stratification of regions, places and their territorial places.”

(17)

The relations that used to draw together the inhabitants and their landscape must be reestablished if we wish to restore the lost balance, both at the local and global level. By focusing on a relatively limited territory, Magnaghi is able to achieve a truly global perspective, as attested by Goldsmith in his introduction, who underlines the similarities between the Italian urban planner and American thinkers and activists such as Wendell Berry and John Cavanagh, director of the International Forum on Globalization, who writes: “The key to genuine democracy in this decade (...) will be the struggle by communities and citizen organizations to control their own destinies, to take control of their own lands and natural resources, to collectively make the decisions that will affect their futures” (Magnaghi xv).

For Magnaghi *territorio* is a work of art, “arguably the highest that humanity has ever produced. Unlike many art works (...) the ‘territory’ is produced through dialogue, a relationship between living entities: the joint evolution of man and nature through the ages of history” (1). Even though he

²⁶ The Italian edition was published by Boringhieri in 2000 with the title *Il progetto locale*.

²⁷ Magnaghi starts with a critique of the concept of sustainable development: “The word ‘sustainability’ contains many dangers. It often covers up the structural causes of social and environmental degradation through actions supporting the established development pattern, without ever calling into question the rules generating it” (34).

prefers to use the word “territory” instead of landscape, his definition of territory is very similar to the one used by Jackson to define landscape: “a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land, functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community” (Jackson 9). In Magnaghi’s view, the territory is endowed with its own personality and identity, “revealed by the signs in its landscape” (1). Protecting one’s territory against the hegemonic forces of globalization, however, is not merely a question of material survival. Reclaiming landscape also means advocating the aesthetic elements that are essential to the reconstruction of the sense of wholeness that George Simmel saw as one of the key features of landscape. “Diritto al paesaggio,” an expression that is becoming more and more common in contemporary documents dealing with landscape,²⁸ also means “right to beauty,” as the character of Peppino Impastato states in Marco Tullio Giordana’s movie. To quote Massimo Quaini one last time:

The values of safety and environmental sustainability, the values of spatial equity and the functional performances that a territory must provide to its inhabitants and users are certainly important, but they are different from the values of landscape, which are necessarily mediated through art and our ability to make sense of the world: this is the ability that we lack the most today.

(18).

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²⁸ See the European Landscape Convention, also known as Florence Convention, adopted by the Council of Europe in 2000: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/landscape/default_en.asp

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