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## **Transformations of the Notion of Landscape in the Context of Nature–Culture Relation**

**Abstract:** The landscape has been of particular interest since the 1970s, and this is largely due to the threats to nature resulting from the climate crisis. The axis of the argument is the assumption of a significant relationship between the concept of landscape and the nature-culture relationship in the modern era and today. The text reflects on the meaning of the concept of landscape in aesthetic and cultural terms and within the framework of contemporary environmental aesthetics and the philosophy of natural heritage. Landscape as an aesthetic idea emerged in the modern era with the development of landscape painting. In J. Ritter's approach, the concept of landscape focuses, as in a lens, on the modern-era attitude of man to nature. Landscape as a medium is not only a genre of art but also becomes a carrier of ideas, social needs and political aspirations. The content of the article refers to the concept of W.J.T. Mitchell and S. Pietraszko. Landscape as an environment and natural heritage will be discussed in the example of A. Carlson's concept and approach to nature and landscape which is reflected in UNESCO conventions.

**Keywords:** Landscape, nature, culture, environmental aesthetics, natural heritage

### **Introduction**

The argument of this paper is based on the assumption that the notion of „landscape” and its transformations show in an emblematic way the changes in nature-culture relation as understood by man. At present, the notion of landscape comes with multiple horizons of meaning. The fact that since the 1970s, the landscape has enjoyed particular interest should be largely attributed to the threats to nature and

the increasing interest in the environment. Landscape became the object of research in many disciplines, from geography through literary studies to philosophy. The research on the landscape with the use of aesthetic and sociological models, canons of literature, methodology of natural history, political science, and – recently – also media studies reveal previously unknown planes of the meaning of this concept. In consequence, we encounter a multitude of definitions, with some of them being of a general nature and some others – of a more specialised one. It should be emphasised that this paper generally passes over the geographic, political or legal implications that have been connected with the notion of „landscape” from the Middle Ages.

The following considerations take into account the motif of the outset of landscape as the genre of painting and the philosophical notion of landscape. In addition to the aesthetic meaning of the notion, they also address other forms of its expression, such as cultural perspective or perspective within the modern environmental aesthetics and the philosophy of natural heritage. The axis of the discussion is the assumption concerning a significant relationship between the notion of landscape and the nature-culture relation.

The period in the history of mankind, which is symbolically defined as the transition from a myth to *logos*, refers to the beginnings of the emergence of the European civilisation. During this time, when the Greek type of rationality was born as a result of a particular coincidence, also the foundations of the European culture emerged. In ancient times, there appeared a differentiation between nature and culture as one of the fundamental indicators of European culture. Plato, the Stoics, Aristotle, and the Christian thinkers emphasised the strict dependence of the microcosm (a human being) on the macrocosm and the order of culture on the order of nature.

At the beginning of modern times, as Charles Taylor emphasises, this relation was broken. The main reason for such a phenomenon should be sought in the new image of the world marked with Cartesianism, which manifested itself in the individualisation of inner forms of existence, in the breaking down into particles of originally coherent wholes, and in the establishment of the modern formula of the subject<sup>1</sup>. Modern science recognised nature as the object of research (in particular Newton’s physics), and natural history aimed at learning about the „objective” nature, alienated from the context of human existence.

## Landscape as an aesthetic idea

The issues of landscape painting were the object of consideration undertaken from the perspective of art theory and philosophy, and their extremely important aspect was the issue of the human being’s relation to nature. This kind of reflection gained importance along with the isolation of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline. Research in the field of the aesthetics of nature, of which on the landscape, can be found in the works by Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, representatives of Jena romanticism or Friedrich W. J. Schelling.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. CH. Taylor, Descartes Disengaged Reason, [in:] idem, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2001, p. 143–159.

When Joachim Ritter wrote about the emergence of ‘landscape’ as a genre of painting<sup>2</sup>, he perceived the outset of modern times in a way similar to Taylor’s. The assumption was that the ability to see the landscape in nature was in relation to the loss of the possibility of uniform sensing of universal nature and identification with it, attributed to the modern times, and the ‘perception of the world in the categories of parts and wholes, the inner and the outer’<sup>3</sup>. Ritter’s conception was expressed in a work from 1963, which is recognised as classic at present: *Landschaft. Zur Funktion des Ästhetischen in der modernen Gesellschaft [Landscape. On the Aesthetic Attitude in Modern Society]*. The beginnings of the history of the idea of landscape are connected by Ritter with Petrarch’s ascent of Mont Ventoux in 1335 and the poet’s relation of this excursion in the letter<sup>4</sup>. The assumed goal of Petrarch’s excursion was to experience the feeling of participation in the totality of nature and in God<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, Petrarch’s way of thinking was undoubtedly significantly influenced by the motifs taken from the philosophical tradition. It refers in particular to the notions of ‘cosmos’ and ‘nature’ (*physis*), ‘totality, and ‘divinity’, which were the main object of philosophy as ‘theory’ from the beginnings in Greece to Neoplatonism and Augustinianism. Therefore, Petrarch climbs the mountain, leaving his ordinary life and its practical requirements, necessities and needs behind him, and in this sense, he ‘transcends’ it to contemplate ‘free’ nature and ‘enjoy the view from the summit’<sup>6</sup>. Yet, the view from the summit made him ultimately realise that in order to achieve the set goal, he should have rather followed the words of Augustine and turned into his inner self. Thus, the sensual view and spiritual experience of nature shared by Petrarch on the summit of the mountain was rejected by himself. In Ritter’s interpretation, this event gained epoch-making character. In his opinion, at that time, nature became a landscape for the first time in the history of humankind and, as such, was the fruit and product of the theoretical spirit. It was the moment of the outset of aesthetic viewing. This process is described by Ritter as follows:

The landscape is nature which manifests itself through the gaze of the observer experiencing it and feeling it aesthetically: ‘landscape’ does not mean the very fields in the suburbs, [...], the very mountains and steppes shepherds [taking care of sheep] and [wandering] caravans (or olive pickers). They transform into landscapes only when a man turns to them, not for some practical purpose, but within

<sup>2</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, landscape painting widely spread throughout Italy, in particular in the Netherlands and thus gained the status of quite common and desired genre. Although landscape enjoyed popularity, yet it was still treated as the genre of painting of lower importance, and it ultimately gained full independence as late as at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and became equal to other genres.

<sup>3</sup> M. Salwa, *Krajobraz. Fenomen estetyczny*, Wydawnictwo Oficyna, Łódź 2020, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> The connections of the description of Petrarch’s climbing with the landscape were indicated by Jacob Burckhardt as early as in 1860 in his work devoted to the culture of the Renaissance; cf. J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance*, transl. S.G.C. Middlemore, The Phaidon, Vienna 1937, p. 152–157, [https://download.tuxfamily.org/openmathdep/history/Renaissance\\_in\\_Italy-Burckhardt.pdf](https://download.tuxfamily.org/openmathdep/history/Renaissance_in_Italy-Burckhardt.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Ritter, *Landschaft. Zur Funktion des Ästhetischen in der modernen Gesellschaft*, (Schriften der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster, H. 54), Münster 1963, p. 9–11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are translated by the authoress of the article.

a “free, a pleasure-filled viewing (Anschauung), to be alone with himself in the bosom of nature. His approach changes perceptions of nature. What – until recently – was useful or lay fallow and was useless, and what was not viewed for ages and to what no attention was paid, or what rejected with hostile strangeness, attains greatness, sublimity and beauty: in the aesthetic [dimension] becomes a landscape<sup>7</sup>.

In such a way, as Ritter believed, a new type of man’s attitude towards the world was manifested; and the sensual experiencing of nature in a way described by Petrarch became a new form of ‘theory’ in the modern times unknown thus far<sup>8</sup>. The contemplation of nature in oneself, which fell in the competence of theoretical philosophy for ages, obtains a new form and shape in the orientation of spirit towards nature as a landscape. The work of the mind and the notions are replaced with sensual view and aesthetic feeling, and philosophy – with poetry and art<sup>9</sup>. What is even more important, the aesthetic turn towards nature is not practically mediated (is not related to human work or some form of utility), and in this meaning, it is ‘free’. Following Ritter, the outset of modern times was also the outset of landscape as the form – unknown that far – of presenting nature in aesthetic medium<sup>10</sup>.

The analysis of Ritter’s standpoint indicates that in his perspective, the landscape is connected with the notion of the cosmos, the totality of nature, and it works like a lens as it gathers the modern relation of man and nature consisting in the separation of man and nature, of the subject and the object. Contrary to the ancient times or the Middle Ages, man is no longer an inseparable part of the cosmos but an autonomous subject that is juxtaposed with nature. Thus, the model proposed by him is essentially epistemological, cognition is based on the distance of the subject from the object of cognition, which, as such, revealed itself together with the Cartesian breakthrough and then was undertaken and developed in the tradition of the Enlightenment. “What has to remain unuttered in the science is the presence of the ‘wholeness of nature’ in the form of the sky and the Earth, which belong to the human life on earth as their natural world perceived with senses”<sup>11</sup>. Science, in its striving after objective knowledge, limits itself to syllabifying phenomena in the area of possible experience. Man distances themselves from nature, being the object of their cognition and action. Such a distance from nature is identified – in a modernistic way – with freedom and self-determination of the subject; “[...] the quality of freedom is that it abandons this binding; freedom causes that it ceases to be a ‘slave of nature’, making it an object for itself as its legislator and subject”<sup>12</sup>. Such a distance constitutes both the cause and the assumption of Ritter’s perspective of the experience of nature as a landscape.

In Ritter’s idea of landscape, the totality of nature as an object is something external to man, and therefore, the movement of transcension is necessary for reconciliation with nature to take place. “Thus, nature becomes landscape only for the one

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Attention is drawn to the ambiguity of the relationship of landscape to the philosophical theory of nature, which is both its continuation and its breaking.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Ritter, *Landschaft*, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 29.

who ‘goes out’ towards it (*transcendus*) in order to participate – ‘in the outside’ – in nature itself as the ‘totality’ that manifests itself in it and as it”<sup>13</sup>. This attitude towards nature is both theoretical and aesthetic as it brings ‘the truth mediated aesthetically’. The distance from nature may be thus overcome in the medium of art. It is denoted by an expression particularly close to this philosopher, namely: nature as landscape (*Natura als Landschaft*). Ritter states:

In such a way, aesthetic nature as a landscape (in opposition to the objective world of natural sciences excluded from the metaphysical cognition) took over the function of visually presenting the whole of nature and expressing harmonious order in the cosmos in images flowing from within, which aesthetically make them present to man<sup>14</sup>.

With the Renaissance, nature ceased to be only the nature of naturalists, an object of knowledge, dominion and use, but also became an object of incomprehensible longing, arousing a reflective, aesthetic attitude of consciousness. The birth of the landscape should be considered one of the manifestations of this process. Ritter remains faithful to the view of the landscape as a previously unknown form of presenting nature in the medium of aesthetics, which emerged with modernity. From his perspective, the landscape in the form in which it was born in modern times is identified with the classic genre of paintings. Ritter tries to justify the belief that the history of the idea of landscape is connected with art, primarily landscape painting.

Simmel and Cassirer also unanimously claim that special sensitivity to landscape should be connected with the beginnings of modern times<sup>15</sup>. In their perspective, natural landscape – although differentiated from art – remains in strict relation with it. The analogy between the perception of natural landscape and landscape painting is used to realise the circumstances that man’s encounter with nature is never something simply natural and that our attitude is somehow defined in advance by the closeness of artistic, aesthetic categories of landscape painting.

Thus a relevant question remains, namely: what is understood by the notion of ‘landscape’? Within the aesthetic-theoretical approaches, the phenomenon of landscape is identified with something pictorial<sup>16</sup>. At the same time, the relation of notions of ‘landscape’ and ‘image’ does not seem to be something particularly debatable. The term ‘landscape’ is identified with an image-object showing some fragment of the world defined as landscape. In this perspective, the aesthetic values of the landscape are taken into account, it is perceived as a visual ‘object’. The constitution of ‘landscape’ as ‘land image, a form of the image of nature, is accurate because we associate landscape not only with the specifically viewed part of nature but also with the totality of nature, which is at the same time experienced through

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 20–21.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. G. Simmel, *Philosophie der Landschaft* (1913), [in:] idem, *Brücke und Tür. Essays des Philosophen zur Geschichte, Religion, Kunst und Gesellschaft*, M. Sustnan, M. Landmann (eds.), Köhler, Stuttgart 1957, p. 144; cf. E. Cassirer, *Esej o człowieku. Wstęp do filozofii kultury*, transl. A. Staniewska, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1998, p. 232–252.

<sup>16</sup> Review of meanings of notion of landscape give Rainer Piepmeier, cf. R. Piepmeier, Das Ende der ästhetischen Kategorie ‚Landschaft‘. Zu einem Aspekt neuzeitlichen Naturverhältnisses, *Westfälische Forschungen*, 30, (1980), p. 8–46.

it at some elementary level. This seemingly unmeasured view of nature, although it seems to cross all boundaries, requires aesthetic establishment by the subject.

The positions of Ritter, Simmel and Cassirer are united by recognising landscape as an aesthetic category and making it a modern invention. According to this approach, treating the landscape as a view required adopting a specific attitude, and the ability to do so was revealed at a specific historical moment. The focus was on the modern distance to nature, on the historical roots of the loss of these bonds. In this sense, it was considered that landscape painting is an excellent reflection of the processes that occurred with modernity and, as if in a lens, it brings together its characteristic motifs.

Ritter's thesis of the separation of man and nature has been the paradigm of research on landscape in the history of the idea in Germany for years. The question that needs to be asked is whether this model can be reasonably applied in relation to the early modern times from which Petrarch's analysed work originates. The more recent literature on the subject opposes this perspective, marked by modernism<sup>17</sup>. The doubts are also cast increasingly often on whether this model is historically justified, i.e. whether it is actually possible to make such divisions and to differentiate the cultures characterised by landscape sensitivity from those which cannot be characterised in this way. At the same time, it should be emphasised that Simmel, Cassirer, or Ritter cared mainly about revealing the reflective aspect demonstrated in the new shaping of man's relation to nature, which – in their opinion – was unknown to earlier epochs.

Also, according to the general belief, the subject of the landscape began to arouse the wider interest of artists and art theorists only with the Renaissance. Fifteenth-century compositions very often take place among natural landscapes (van Eyck, Giorgione, Carpaccio), although in many cases it is subject to idealisation and stylisation (della Francesca, Botticelli, da Vinci, Bosch). Leonardo da Vinci was one of the few artists of that time who sketched the landscape from nature and made it an autonomous theme of the composition. Albrecht Dürer and seventeenth-century landscape painting (Bruegel The Elder) played an extremely important role in the process of shaping this type of painting. Bruegel's innovative paintings are compositions depicting truly Flemish landscapes saturated with details, but at the same time, in addition to the narrative thread, they also convey a mood of reverie and reflection. The landscape is a sign of divine creation and the relationship between man and nature. With the painting and philosophy of Romanticism, the landscape is no longer perceived through the prism of the idea of imitating what is real. The aesthetics of the sublime determines the experience of the landscape, and with it, it is idealised, anthropomorphised, and assumes a symbolic character. Thus, in the

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<sup>17</sup> Karol Sauerland refers to the research by Ruth and Dieter Groh who claim that the subject of Petrarch's *Letter* was not aesthetically experienced landscape, as Ritter assumes. What is more, in their opinion, the work was the effect of 'a literary strategy' as there are many things that show that Petrarch did not climb Mont Ventoux and just made up the whole excursion, cf. K. Sauerland, *Kontrowersja wokół wspinaczki Petrarcki*, [in:] *Studia z filozofii niemieckiej*, t. 2: *Szkola Rittera*, S. Czerniak, J. Rolewski (Eds.), Wydawnictwo UMK, Toruń 1996, p. 170–171; cf. R. i D. Groh, *Petrarca und der Mont Ventoux*, *Merkur*, 1992, H. 517.

course of this historical process, there was a gradual transition from the Renaissance vision of landscape as an aesthetic representation (view) of nature to more contemporary perspectives of its approach.

## Landscape as a medium – a cultural approach to landscape

Definition of landscape by Mitchell: “it is not a genre of art but a medium which is the expression of exchange between man and nature in all cultures but has a special position in European history<sup>18</sup>. This definition echoes the dimension of the community-like, intersubjective dimension of the experience of nature, the issue of its cultural coding (land – landscape).

Different contexts of the meaning of landscape as a culturally coded approach to nature appear in numerous discourses in the scope of aesthetics, philosophy, cultural studies, and literary studies, as well as in national self-understanding and politics. Culture-oriented researchers share the belief that landscape is necessarily related to human experience and does not exist by itself but is constituted and seen as such only with the act of awareness. According to this perspective, the experience of nature occurs in the view of different cultural and historical traditions, which also include local and regional narratives together with the elements of folklore or mythology recorded in the stories about nature. From the perspective of cultural models, landscape painting is evidence of the attitude towards nature and shows the experience of nature or the distance from it. It is a moment in which the cultural dimension of our understanding of nature becomes expressed.

Although the contemporary everyday use of the term ‘landscape’ barely echoes the reference to the notion of ‘land’, this issue has been increasingly addressed in recent times. To many researchers, the awareness of landscape is clearly linked not only to the physical experience of one’s own surroundings but also to the feeling of belonging to the community living there. What is interesting, contemporary analyses reveal that the meaning of landscape used to be more strictly linked to the perception of the land and its community than to the experience of nature. It can be particularly noticed in medieval paintings (e.g. views of towns), which often and indirectly constitute the image reflecting the divisions consistent with the feudal system and the power structure and are assumed to show the well-being of the community resulting from good governance. The social and political aspects of the meaning are also present in many landscape paintings from modern times, and therefore, the term ‘political landscape’ also appeared in the literature on the subject. Although specific and historical conditions of the formation of (home)lands are not a direct component of the modern notion of landscape, it is nevertheless impossible to deny their significance. The fact that landscape was not ‘innocent’ and had political and social functions has yet another dimension. Landscape, in its role as a metaphorical intermediary of political and social ideas of community, could

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<sup>18</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Imperial Landscape*, [in:] *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell (Ed.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 2002, p. 5.

contribute to the transformation of nature<sup>19</sup>. In this case, the specific view of the landscape became a stereotyped motif of national identification, such as mills and ferries, sand dunes and channels for the Dutch landscape, the view of the Alps for Switzerland, fertile meadowland for England, or a dirt road with weeping willows for Poland. Such views – sings, *Landschaftstopoi*, recorded in painting, graphic arts and culture, which have not changed much by this day, could not be without influence on the community awareness in the scope of perceiving their own homeland. What is material (painted) becomes in strict interaction with what is mentally subjective yet marked collectively as well. It can be assumed that paintings would be impossible without language discourses on landscape, and at the same time, the paintings shape the notions decisive for the perception of landscape.

In this context, it is worth noticing that within the research on landscape, we can encounter the separation of notions of ‘space’ and ‘place’. The ‘space’ of the ‘landscape’ is defined in terms of internal relations between the objects located in this space as well as in terms of the orientation to what is external, i.e. the observing viewer. The space in landscape paintings is demonstrated as the bonding element, a scheme ordering the content. In paintings of great landscape painters, we can even talk about the logic of space as the independent artistic power organising the entirety of the presentation. While ‘place’ means that the presented view of the landscape should be interpreted not only as the presentation of a specific fragment of nature but also as the world of a viewer for whom it was prepared. The place of the landscape is the expression of the community/individual experience and is an ‘element’ defined by time and space linked to a specific history. In this perspective, the aesthetic potential of cultural traditions in experiencing natural environments, as well as human environments, is crucial. Such traditions are particularly crucial for appreciating the so-called cultural landscapes (home landscapes), i.e. the environments which are important in the culture and history of a given community. The sense of place, together with the ideas and notions originating from folklore, mythology, religion and history, may have a significant role in experiencing landscapes of that type<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, this type of landscape has not only local but also locating quality. In this group, we may include the views of sacred places such as Calvary or Jerusalem, towns and cities recognised locally or famous throughout the world (like Venice and Rome). A classic example is the aforementioned Dutch landscape painting, sand dunes and channels of the Dutch landscape, which, in fact do not show actual places but are typical of this landscape. Landscapes dominated by specific places are the evidence of how social self-understanding is rooted in this place and the evidence of comprehensive transformations in the scope of the image of the world, both in the dimension of individual and social self-awareness (self-understanding of nations). Stanisław Pietraszko thinks about landscape in a similar vein when he states:

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<sup>19</sup> From late 1970s, in particular, a sociological perspective has been emerging in landscape research where landscape is perceived as a product of ‘the social treatment of nature’.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Y. Saito, The Japanese Appreciation of Nature, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 25, (1985), p. 239–251; cf. A. Carlson, Appreciation and the Natural Environment, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 37, (1979), p. 267–276.



The subjectivity of the human individual viewing a particular fragment of an area reachable by sight gives each such ‘view’ a more or less individual character [...]; it can also [...] make the appearance unique as a whole. But even in such cases, in the individual images of a given object, there are still certain features of the object, common to all images, which are indicative of the identity of this very ‘view’ and of its intersubjectivity at the same time <sup>21</sup>.

Pietraszko does not identify landscape directly with landscape painting. However, given the ontic status of landscape, he traditionally identifies it with the ‘view’ of nature. Thus, he recognises their ontic otherness. What is important, he undermines the differentiation between natural and cultural landscapes as – given his findings and somehow his assumptions – each landscape is of a cultural, intersubjective nature.

Contemporary thought dealing with the issue of landscape goes far beyond the viewpoint developed by tradition. All conceptions of landscape presented thus far, both the aesthetic-theoretical perspectives and the perspectives referring to the cultural dimension, have some common features which ultimately determine that such conceptions may be considered the variants of the so-called “picturesque model”<sup>22</sup>. The term ‘picturesque’ literally means ‘producing images’; in the picturesque model, nature is experienced following the example of the experience associated with the perception of art, which means that it is recommended to experience nature aesthetically, by analogy to how the landscape painting is appreciated. The criticism of picturesque model indicates that landscape is treated in this case as ‘purely visual object’, two-dimensional one which is appreciated as if it was a painted landscape by the viewer standing in front of it at some distance. This approach is accused of subjectivity (connected with the emphasis on the consciousness of the individual subject or cultural consciousness) and anthropocentrism. Attention is also drawn to the fact that understanding the landscape as a view entails the static approach, focusing on the aesthetic, formal and visual aspects while passing over other senses (hearing, smell, etc.) and recognising that the landscape is an image, a scenery created by man and his visual apparatus. In consequence, the picturesque model does not correctly appreciate nature, the real character of the natural environment is distorted, and the normal experiencing and understanding of nature are not appreciated.

The current philosophical research thought is characterised by the departure from the decisive role of art in the understanding of landscape. There has been a revival in research on the cultural landscape, resulting in several concepts that go beyond the picturesque model and its subordination of nature to culture, especially art. As a result, the landscape is gradually deprived of its purely visual quality and ceases to be considered an ‘object’ or a ‘view’ situated like a painting in front of a viewer. Aesthetic values such as picturesque quality, sublime, aura, unique character, and colourfulness give in to the perspective of landscape as the reality surrounding us. The changes in the attitude to landscape should be associated with the response to the increasing social concern about the degradation of the natural environment and

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<sup>21</sup> S. Pietraszko, *Krajobraz i kultura*, [in:] *Krajobrazy. Antologia*, B. Frydryczak, D. Angutek (Eds.), Wydawnictwo PTPN, Poznań 2014, p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Environmental Aesthetics* (Eighteenth Century Aesthetics of Nature), Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/environmental-aesthetics> (10 October 2023).

the vision of climatic disasters. Over the past decades, one has observed increasingly strong ecological tendencies at the level of civic society, non-government organisations, political movements and in the scientific and academic dimension. Given the pressure of circumstances, the contemporary man thoroughly redefines the aspect of viewing their role and place in the order of the world. In consequence, we are the eye-witnesses of the change in the scope of understanding the nature-culture relation connected with the attempts to appreciate nature ‘on its own terms’<sup>23</sup>.

### Landscape as an environment and natural heritage

The aforementioned tendencies are exemplified by the conception of Arnold Berleant’s ‘aesthetics of engagement’ representing the ‘non-cognitive’ environmental aesthetics. Berleant calls for immersing in the natural environment and minimising the distance in the aesthetic experience of nature. The experience of nature is about creating some kind of continuum with the surroundings. The aesthetics of engagement considers the environment as a ‘seamless unity of places, organisms and perceptions’ and emphasises the role of multi-sensory experiencing of nature.

While Allen Carlson proposed that the term landscape should be replaced by the term environment, he formulated his model, which he called natural environmental model<sup>24</sup>. In Carlson’s natural environmental model, the landscape is identified with the surroundings, which are three-dimensional and dynamic, and at the same time, objective, independent of man and embracing man experiencing it (in a much wider spectrum than just visual). This new type of aesthetic attitude to nature is open to the changeable and undefined quality of nature and refers to its multi-sensory experience. Carlson claims that a full aesthetic experience of natural environments requires knowledge about nature (natural history, biology, ecology, etc.), the knowledge of what the natural environment is and how it functions. For this reason, his concept is included in the so-called cognitive environmental aesthetics. Carlson believes that scientific knowledge of nature is helpful in the scope of disclosing actual aesthetic values of natural objects and environments. It was also intended to guarantee that the aesthetic experience of nature would be different from that which accompanies the perception of art. The experience of the naturalness of nature was opposed not to culture but to art.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Y. Saito, Appreciating Nature on its Own Terms, *Environmental Ethics*, 20, (1998), p. 135.

<sup>24</sup> Environmental aesthetics has been developed as a sub-discipline of philosophical aesthetics for more than forty years. The origins of environmental aesthetics date back to the ideas of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers who considered nature the ideal source of aesthetic experiences (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Burke, Kant). The conceptions of disinterestedness, beauty, sublime and picturesque (Gilpin, Price) were the leading ideas of the contemporary aesthetics of nature. At present, environmental aesthetics includes a lot of different standpoints, including but not limited to cognitive and non-cognitive, conceptual and non-conceptual ones. This aesthetics examines and encourages the appreciation of not only the natural environment but also the landscapes created by man and modified by man: cf. *Environmental Aesthetics*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/environmental-aesthetics> (10 October 2023).

Carlson's standpoint was criticised. Mainly due to its cognitive character, excessive focus on the objectivity of landscape and – in fact – making it independent from the connection with the actual human experience. Thus, the idea of a disinterested observer was also questioned. With time, Carlson transformed his conception and integrated it into the notion of cultural landscape and findings in the scope of 'aesthetics of engagement'. In consequence, his thought included not only natural environments but also urban and rural landscapes created or modified by man, cultural landscapes. Furthermore, he decided that the aesthetic experience of nature as nature relies not only on scientific and general knowledge but also on the work of imagination, emotional attitude, or cultural representations of nature. In Mateusz Salwa's opinion, Carlson's thought also includes the grounds supporting the new holistic approach to nature. In this scope, Carlson's conception expresses the modern tendencies in the scope of the aesthetic experience of natural heritage, the attitude identified with the 'landscape' model<sup>25</sup>.

The 'landscape' model generally differs from the 'collector's' model effective thus far. The latter one founds the aesthetic experience of natural heritage on the separation of culture from nature, which results in the exclusion of natural objects and areas, landscapes considered to be particularly valuable from everyday life. In this model, nature is reduced to the sum of material remains of the past, is recognised as heritage and therefore is protected. It should be emphasised that nature is appreciated either through the prism of natural sciences or from the perspective of aesthetic criteria developed in connection with human creativity. As a consequence, natural heritage is subordinated to cultural heritage, natural objects and beautiful landscapes are viewed, visited, and admired as if they were the objects of art and culture displayed in museums or galleries.

This approach is reflected in *The Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972)<sup>26</sup> adopted by UNESCO, which recognises natural monuments, geological and physiographic formations, and natural zones as natural heritage. According to the provisions of the *Convention*, heritage is defined as a set of material entities worthy of protection due to their aesthetic and scientific value, which is objectively determined by experts appointed for this purpose. The UNESCO document provides an understanding of heritage as a kind of unique object which, due to its value, should be protected against any change, primarily from destruction resulting from human activity.

Unlike this one, the 'landscape' model understands natural heritage as a phenomenon constituting the element of the human way of experiencing the world. The 'landscape' aesthetic experience makes it possible to discover those qualities of nature which are the most characteristic of it, individual, and not those which are derivative of art and culture. This perspective in the aesthetic plane takes into

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<sup>25</sup> This discussion of the differences between the collector's and landscape ways of aesthetic experience of nature is based on Mateusz Salwa's article "Wstęp do filozofii dziedzictwa innego-niż-ludzkie [Introduction to the philosophy of other-than-human-heritage, cf. M. Salwa, Wstęp do filozofii dziedzictwa innego-niż-ludzkie, *Kultura współczesna. Teoria. Interpretacje. Praktyka*, (113) 1, p. 168.

<sup>26</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape>; <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-concerning-protection-world-cultural-and-natural-heritage> (2 November 2023).

account the presence of man and – at the same time – emphasises the natural, i.e. not artificial, other-than-human, quality of nature. Other-than-human and simultaneously immanent elements of the human world. Natural heritage and landscapes are the reality we live in, that we are immersed in, and that we interact with. This attitude is oriented toward the protection of natural heritage but not through treating it as a museum object, protecting it against change, influence by people, and culture. This approach emphasises the dynamic character of natural objects or cultural landscapes and at the same time, recognises that it is possible to separate the natural dynamics inherent in them from the dynamics that threaten them, coming from outside. The protection of nature means cooperation with it and consent to the possibility of human intervention in nature based on the *sustainability approach*<sup>27</sup>. Thus, the protection of nature means blurring the difference between natural and cultural heritage. A new understanding of the culture-nature relationship is combined with a new understanding of the concept of landscape.

It should be emphasised that although the concept of landscape was first introduced into UNESCO documents in 1992, it was only *The European Landscape Convention*<sup>28</sup>, adopted in 2000, that introduced a new understanding of the concept of landscape. This document, for the first time, clearly emphasises the role of landscapes in human life and, at the same time, recognises them as an important component of cultural and natural heritage. It views the landscape as the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. This definition is an expression of the contemporary understanding of landscape because it breaks with the artistic-geographic approach to landscape. Landscape is no longer understood as a kind of image of a country stretching out before a competent observer but as an environment of which people are a part, a place where they stay and act. For this reason, the landscape began to be seen as a common space defined by accepted customs and laws and therefore defined by the order of values recognised by the people co-creating it. The landscape is, therefore not contemplated but experienced. It is not only a material creation resulting from natural processes and/or human activities and a trace of history, but it emerges when such an environment is experienced by people who are not external experts. In this sense, it is as much objective as it is subjective or intersubjective.

The characteristic feature of the contemporary attitude to the natural environment is the undermining of traditional dichotomies, as first – the dichotomy between the subject and the object, between nature and culture. Recent research focuses on the ethical aspect of man's relationship to nature, and landscape ethics is developing intensively. Old divisions and ideas are questioned. On the one hand, the natural landscape is no longer a space subject to unlimited expansion by individual or collective subject. On the other hand, it is not also the object of distanced, objective and objectifying examination. The image of the nature-culture relation is being transformed in the direction of revealing their interactions and co-existence in one

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<sup>27</sup> The term comes from a UNESCO document: "Culture, Creativity and Sustainable Development. Research, Innovation, Opportunities (4 October 2014), [http://www.lacult.unesco.org/docc/ENG\\_Florence\\_Declaration\\_4oct.pdf](http://www.lacult.unesco.org/docc/ENG_Florence_Declaration_4oct.pdf) (30 October 2023).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/the-european-landscape-convention> (2 November 2023).

world. Natural heritage and cultural heritage are two dimensions of the same world. The contemporary philosophy of landscape therefore aims to redefine the notion of the landscape towards understanding it as the category combining what is natural with what is human; what is physical with what is spiritual; what is natural with what is cultural.

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